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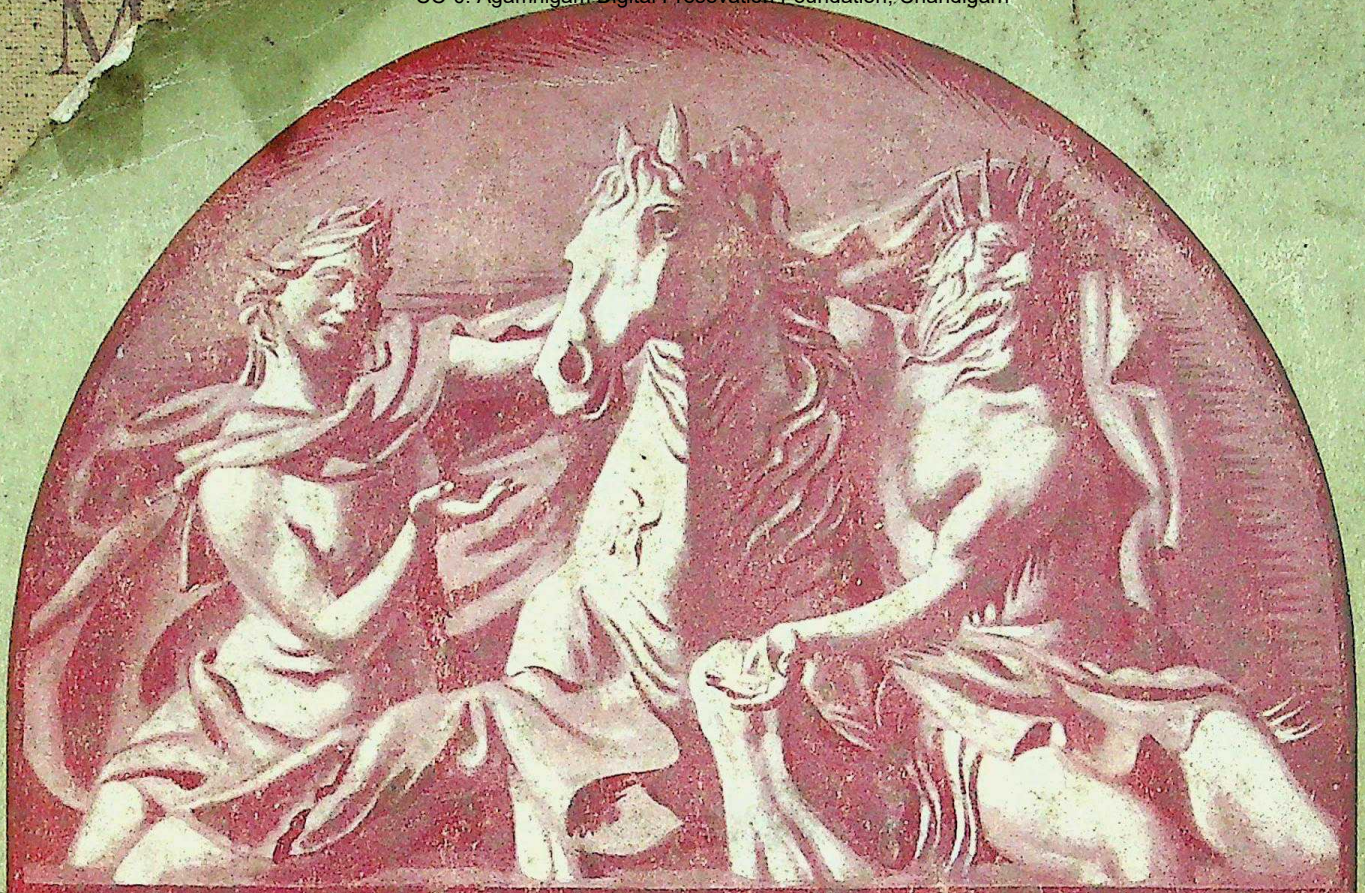

MURAL PAINTING

Hans Feibusch

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I. HANS FEIBUSCH. DETAIL FROM 'PILGRIM'S PROGRESS'
MURAL PAINTING: ST. ELIZABETH'S, EASTBOURNE

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MURAL PAINTING

BY

HANS FEIBUSCH

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY SIR CHARLES REILLY
AND FIFTY-EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK
4, 5 & 6 SOHO SQUARE LONDON W.1
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MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

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To

My Wife

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Introduction

THIS book, with the breadth of view and wide cultural outlook the author shows, is appearing at exactly the right moment, both for architects and painters. Modern architecture having, with its armour of steel, concrete, glass and other hard materials, won its offensive battle against the old formulae of expression, has now itself to give meaning and expression to the space it has conquered. Till now it has been so deeply engaged in forging its weapons that it has given little time or thought to what it should do with its conquered territory. Having from its nature eschewed ornament, how is it to explain the spiritual content and meaning of its achievements? We cannot for ever be content with bare walls, curved or straight. Our discontent indeed is beginning to show itself in various ways, such as sudden changes of textures, a mass for instance of rugged rubble wall next some glittering highly finished surface, the use of a different colour for each wall, and so on. These are signs that we now want to go a step further, and this is where I am sure the mural painter, if he knows his art and its capacities as the author does, and practises it with a like skill, can help us. He can give meaning to our surfaces and at the same time make that meaning coincide with their architectural purpose. That was, as the author rightly points out, the great achievement of the Baroque period. Architects, painters and sculptors were then all imbued with the same sense of movement in infinite space. The modern architect too wants to reach out into it, not with the swirling movement of the Baroque but with the poised and tense energy of a bird or aeroplane about to take flight. This implies every part of the structure has its deep inherent meaning, a meaning for which he at present has no symbols, but which the mural painter, with his feeling for structure and surface, and the imaginative tools modern painting has given him, can express. As architecture to-day has broken its fetters, so has painting. She too is ready for the new adventure, an adventure which, like the author, I believe the two arts, architecture and painting, should now take together.

The position of sculpture in relation to the present phase of architecture is

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more difficult to see. A surface whose chief meaning lies in its extension as a plane does not lend itself to modelling in three dimensions. It would seem that so far the place of sculpture is to act as a foil to modern construction rather than to decorate it. In doing this it can give a much-needed humanity to the total composition but cannot become an integral part of the building in the way mural painting can. Hence the added importance to-day of the latte .

CHARLES REILLY

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Acknowledgments

My thoughts go out first to Maxwell Fry, from whom I learned so much while we worked together and talked, in the old days; to "Prof"—Sir Charles Reilly—helpful, stimulating, full of vision and enthusiasm, conjuring up the most wonderful job just when one feels at the lowest ebb; and to Frankland Dark, with whom it is such a pleasure to collaborate. These are the architects who made it possible for me to gain practical experience.

As for this book, I am chiefly indebted to the Rev. C. B. Mortlock, at whose suggestion I wrote it and who greatly aided me in many ways; H. J. K. Tisdall, the mural painter, helped me with his wide knowledge of technique and materials; Michael Rachlis, the architect, made valuable comments on the relationship between the two arts.

The illustrations proved most difficult to procure in wartime, and not all of them are as good as I should have liked; this goes chiefly for modern Continental ones, but even a few of the great masterpieces of the past were surprisingly elusive. Mr. John Rothenstein very kindly permitted me to choose some photographs from the collection shown at the Tate Gallery Exhibition in 1939 and was most helpful. Prof. Saxl and Dr. Wittkower of the Warburg Institute, and Mr. A. W. Wheen of the Victoria & Albert Museum, were good enough to supply me with many reproductions of old masters. For other photographs I am obliged to the Editor of *The Studio*, the Marquess of Anglesey, my friend Adrian Allinson, Mr. R. B. Sully, Countess Grete Montgelas and Miss Hilda Cramer. Finally, my wife controlled my tendency to use the wrong prepositions.

Some of the world's greatest mural paintings, falling within the scope of this book and mentioned in the text, will not be found represented among the illustrations. Leonardo's Last Supper, Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura and Stanza dell' Incendio can be looked up in the most modest school library. If I do not show Sir Augustus John's mural panels, which by their richness, vigour and beautiful painting, although not always by coherent composition,

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dwarf all other contemporary wall painting, it is again because they have been reproduced a great deal. On the other hand, I bring only one example from the vast mass of work done recently in British Restaurants, canteens and hostels, because the rest, as far as I have seen, is not very distinguished.

I found Veronese's 'Europa and the Bull' in my own collection of photographs and, simply because of its beauty, could not resist including it.

I have made use of the following books:

J Popp: *Die figurale Wandmalerei*, 1921.

W. Baynes: *The Art of Decorative Painting*, 1921.

M. Doerner: *The Materials of the Artist*, 1935.

F. H. Jackson: *Mural Painting*, 1904.

N. Pevsner: *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, 1936.

E. Maxwell Fry: *Fine Building*, 1944.

The Papers of the Society of Mural Decorators and Painters in Tempera, 1901–1907, 1928.

H. F.

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I

Outlines

I START writing this book with slight trepidation. I am a painter, not much used to expressing myself in words and still hampered by the difficulties of a language which, although it has now become my own, is not the one in which I was brought up. If I persist nevertheless, it is because I see a situation before me unusually propitious to an art I love, but also beset with danger; and because I imagine that I might help to clarify it.

We are on the outset of a new building era; tremendous tasks are to be undertaken, and we have, by lucky coincidence or providence, a new and vigorous architecture to tackle them. At the same time the interest in mural painting is reviving amongst architects, painters and the public; the hopes for a great art to rise up again are higher than they have been for the last 150 years; but there is also great danger that naïve enthusiasm and lack of knowledge might cause speedy disillusionment.

It is a difficult thing to see in a new light an art practised long ago in circumstances entirely different from our own; an art that flourished amongst people to whom the world was more spiritual and at the same time more tangible and colourful, who expressed their thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears, naturally in pictures, and who had an unbroken tradition in setting out these pictures on their walls. All that has changed. Our thoughts have become abstract, complicated and grey as mice. The tradition of mural painting, although not the technique, is lost.

Still, here we are at a moment most favourable to a new start; so that I thought it might be opportune for one who was fortunate enough to gain some experience to sum up our situation; to state the aims of mural painting as he sees them; to go through the achievement of the past and see what can be salvaged; to discuss some contemporary work and try to establish a few general laws. And to end up with a technical part and some personal advice.

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Mural painting always rises and falls with architecture. This is, of course, a truism; but it shows to what extent the two arts have become separated if such a simple truth has to be stated again. Every great style in architecture has had a corresponding style in mural painting. The last one to be called great, the last style that brought new solutions to the general problems of building and to express the spiritual character and aspect of a whole period, the Baroque, also saw the last great outburst of mural painting. Tragically enough, it was not only the last great flowering of both arts, it also showed them in their greatest triumph of mutual interpenetration. Each needed, completed, emphasized the other, and in this united effort they rose to such heights, extended their realms so far, soared to such ecstasies, that, when they had at last exhausted themselves, nothing was left to either but to limp along, through the years, from one gothic or classical revival to the other. Architecture and painting, it is never very easy to say which of the two leads the other, went through the same peregrinations during the 19th century and suffered the same indignities, falling to depths never known before. The 1840's seemed to bring a revival; but in spite of all hopes, and they rose very high in this country, it turned out to be only a sham, a masquerade in which the style and the technique of another time were imitated without understanding. The industrial age misused pitilessly both Christian and Pagan mythology and symbols for its robust self-glorification till nobody could bear their hollow forms any longer. Several heroic attempts to create a new style, such as Puvis de Chavannes', Hans von Marées' or the Pre-Raphaelites', could not succeed, because there was no congenial architecture to support them and because they looked too much towards the past for inspiration. The horrors of 'Art Nouveau,' which show the danger of a style based entirely on aesthetic principles, are still fresh in our memory. Eventually mural painting fell into utter disrepute; the attention of the painters, and all their creative power, had long turned towards other directions, and the architects were coping with new structural problems.

While it thus seemed as if the two arts were drawing further and further apart, completely forgetting each other in the vigorous pursuit of their separate aims, they both underwent a rejuvenating process which, by now, has made them fit to join forces once more. Architecture has rid herself of the ghosts of the past, the old styles; she has gained a new freedom and, with the help of the new building materials, a range of possibilities never known before. She is,

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however, still too much in the hands of the technician and the engineer, and while her achievements are splendid as long as they are confined to strictly utilitarian aims, she cannot claim yet to be an expression of modern man's spiritual world. A certain visionary power to create forms symbolising eternity, as seen in our time, is still missing. There is still too much of the negative quality of the reformer in her, and of that original romanticizing over the machine as the panacea of art and life. There is also the danger that the modern architect, thinking in vast conceptions and standardised units, might lose touch with the simple human being and de-humanize his constructions. We hear so much about functionalism; every student talks about it and thinks of Gropius and Le Corbusier. But, after all, every real style of architecture was functional; they all served that purpose foremost which was of the greatest importance to their builders. A Gothic church is the perfect place for worship, a Baroque palace for grand ceremonies. Only the falsed buildings of the 19th century created the gap between style and purpose. Modern architecture simply serves different functions which to our times seem more important, those of material use, and it is significant that every time she attempts to step out of that range, the results are rather poor. This is where the painter or sculptor comes in; he may be an unpractical fellow, but he sometimes has that detached visionary force which architecture seems to require at the moment, and also the nearness to human feelings which the architect is in danger of losing. It must not be forgotten that several times in history painters created the new styles which architects then built.

The painter's development since the second half of the last century has fitted him eminently for the new job. He has thrown off the dark colour, that horrible gallery tone, and the old-masterly forms which had become meaningless. Impressionism has lightened his palette, given him a new sensitiveness for colour, more acute even than that of the Venetians, and a sharp eye to take in the new world. The Post-Impressionists and Cézanne taught him a new static quality, an architectural ability to build pictures with form and colour, and a new conception of space very similar to that of modern architecture. Eventually such artists as Picasso and the constructivists invented the very forms out of which the aesthetics of modern building have grown. But while engaged upon this process of reorganisation, painting incurred the danger of withdrawing too much into itself, of becoming too autonomous and self-

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sufficient, just as architecture has in her own way. And, what is worse, painting has gradually reached a stage of atomization where every artist does his private research and expresses himself in his own language, and where there is such a babel of shouting voices as has never been heard before, so that the bewildered public does not know which way to turn and gradually loses interest.

We have, therefore, come to a point where it would be of the greatest mutual advantage for painting and architecture to draw together again as of old; painting to be liberated from the dangerous isolation of the studio and gathered into the purposefulness of the building; architecture to be inspired and enriched by the inventiveness and colour of the painter. They are both young again; they talk the same language; they could be of so much use to each other and achieve such splendid results. Modern architecture with its large, bare walls; modern painting with its ability for designing in flat planes and its rich, luminous colour; what wonderful things they could do together. And in times when the most rigid economy will be practised and the architect forced to build as cheaply as possible, with the simplest materials and finish, when he cannot afford beautiful woods or stone or metal to give his buildings some elegance, of what outstanding help could the mural painter be by inventing a good colour scheme for the whole building and creating, with his paintings, a festive, gay, dignified atmosphere. And on the painter's side? How many are there who have longed all their lives to paint on walls, to produce work of that simple, final, monumental character that only a mural painting can achieve, released from the bonds of the picture frame?

The stage seems therefore set for a re-union of the two arts. Why then, in spite of some experiments, is there so much hesitation? It is because both parties have lost touch with each other, are uncertain about the other's abilities and do not know how much they may concede him. The architect is still terrified of advancing beyond the safety of his bare walls; he does not know much about painting, these days. All he appreciates, as a rule, is a certain decorative quality; anything beyond that disturbs him. He likes flat surfaces, well-defined outlines, light colour and a neat finish, whether the work be abstract or representational. There are some justifiable reasons for this demand, as I shall show later on; but, on the other hand, there are different ways of doing mural paintings; the scope of possibilities is much larger than the architect knows and the flat decoration mentioned above lies dangerously open to over-simplification,

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shallowness and pretty-prettiness. If, in order to make myself quite clear, I may choose an example from the sister art, sculpture, where conditions are similar: on the one hand there is the great popularity amongst architects of Eric Gill's work which commends itself chiefly for that pleasant, neat surface quality, while on the other hand they have been fighting shy of Henry Moore, whose work springs very much more out of the same spirit as modern architecture than Gill's, but whose strong three-dimensional qualities and powerful expression ask for an initial effort on the part of the architect in understanding and in use. Of the immense service which the painter can render to him beyond the decoration of a set piece of wall, the architect knows even less.

The painter, on his side, has much to learn, too. He often does not realize that he is to enter into a partnership which asks for a certain amount of give and take. He is not at all well informed on modern architecture, on the functions of the wall, the difference between an easel and a mural painting nor on the diverse techniques of the latter.

This book tries to help both sides. It is written by a painter and of course I know more about my work than about that of the architect. But I have lived in continuous contact and interchange of ideas with architects and have worked with a certain number of them, so that I hope to be able to help them a little, too, in tackling this question of mural painting. The situation at present, hopeful though it is, has its dangers and some are becoming apparent. A mural painting, at the first glance, seems quite an easy thing to do. Any nice design, a poster, a superficial sketch, a child's drawing, will look pleasant on a wall. It almost seems as if the mural could not be light and superficial enough; the more serious and tightly knit the work, the duller and heavier often the effect. We have seen lately masses of decorations being done all over the country, in canteens, workshops, hostels, restaurants, all of them jolly and loud, and most of them rather superficial. Our best artists hardly ever do one, because they know the difficulties involved; while the people who rush in cheerfully are often second-rate painters whose cruder artistic sensibility is satisfied with a simple decorative effect. Now although these bright and gaudy things are perhaps sufficient as decorations of a temporary kind, they might give rise to the idea that this is what a modern mural should look like, or that this is the best modern painters can do, and so discourage from the beginning architects or patrons of a more discriminating taste, or make our good painters shrug

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their shoulders and declare that what they have to say cannot be uttered in so primitive a medium. But in the past the greatest artists have expressed themselves in mural paintings. They often, in fact, only rose to their highest achievements when they were given large wall spaces to decorate. It is not true that the painter has to tone himself down for the sake of the architecture; that is a misconception due to ignorance of the special laws of the craft. There are certain governing rules and limits as in every other discipline, but these can be turned into stimulating influences by the artist who masters them. Once the painter has understood the particular requirements he will be able to give his very best and express himself as completely as in an easel painting. It is the aim of this book to make architects and artists realize what tremendous possibilities lie before them; what opportunities worthy of the greatest talents. I do not wish it to be a step-ladder by which the perpetrators of easy decorations may reach greater proficiency.

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II

The Past

BEFORE setting out to establish the laws of mural painting in general I shall take the reader on a short tour through history; not to show him the vast and most complicated panorama of mural painting in its entirety, with innumerable fascinating and beautiful details, but with the idea of pointing out some features that will help him to find governing principles and different ways of approach. My choice out of the endless amount of work done through the ages may seem meagre, but I am not concerned with a general enumeration or an appreciation of the most beautiful murals, but rather with a critical survey of formal qualities for a practical purpose. For this it will suffice if I confine myself to European art. Other civilizations have produced great mural paintings; but in some, the Indian for example, these magnificent works spring out of metaphysical and aesthetic conceptions so different from our own that it would only cause confusion to bring them in here. Besides, while now and then European art has needed the invigorating influence of some strange culture to get out of the rut of academic convention, our own times are rather surfeited with old and new stimulants, and establishment of fundamental principles seems to be the first necessity. Some readers may ask: Why then trouble about the past at all? We live in a new world; show us what contemporary mural painting looks like, here and in other countries. It is our own architecture that we wish to decorate; let us find out how to do that. To which I can only reply: It is true; the past is gone; there is a deep gap between it and our time. Our ideas, interests, living conditions, our education and general knowledge have changed and are going to change the world into something completely foreign to anything that was before this century began. There are some artists who want to start afresh; they have the force and sufficient belief in themselves and the future to discard every scrap of established convention in order to create their own. But I belong to those who are slightly sceptical of the

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future; not that I doubt its great material achievements in every way of life, but I find the new theories of art and the work produced out of them, although often very vigorous, to be very one-sided, strangely subject to fashion and short-lived. An occasional draught of old art, as a stabilizing or corrective influence, might not be so bad. Not to imitate, but to compare aims and standards of achievement should be salutary.

The history of wall painting begins with a work of such superb quality and seeming maturity, that I must mention it although it does not form a link in that tradition with which I am here concerned. With the cave drawings at Altamira in Spain, art springs into being fully fledged. A masterpiece, shining out of prehistoric darkness; an immensely vital and perfectly handled thing, in which power of observation, selection of essential features and translation into the medium used are fused into a unity not often reached during later ages. But, for all their beauty and technical quality, I should not call them real mural paintings in our sense, because some of the most essential features are lacking. There is no relation between the single objects depicted, nor between the objects and the surrounding wall space. These shortcomings are, of course, easily explained, by the absence of any architecture and the more ritual than decorative use of the pictures. But they permit us right at the beginning to discover by their very absence some qualities we look for as essential to mural painting, namely composition, rhythm and balance. It is the relationship of the part to the whole, permitting the eye to travel from one part to the other along quasi-geometrical lines, a satisfactory distribution of weight over the whole surface, for which we shall search in all styles.

Leaving out two great periods, those of Egyptian and of Minoan art which, from my point of view, contain no formal elements that are not to be found in later European painting, I shall begin with the Greco-Roman mural which foreshadows the whole of our development. In an incredibly short time it seems to have run through all the stages which it took Western art many centuries to cover. Nothing remains to us of these stages save some curious but amateurish descriptions by Pliny the Younger and Vitruvius; nothing remains, in fact, of Greek painting at its height either. It is maddening to discover that all we know belongs to a time when decline had long ago set in and that small remnants and copies done by ordinary hacks are all that is left, so that one gets glimpses here and there but never a proper look behind the curtain. The copies

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of famous paintings, of which there are often several versions, show how casually the work was done as a rule and with how little understanding. Figures are torn out of their surroundings, chopped and changed to meet different tastes and fitted into unsuitable backgrounds. Nevertheless, what remains shows flashes of unbelievable grandeur and complete mastery of all formal and technical problems. As always in times of decline, however, the technical experience still functions while the driving ideas behind it have begun to shrink, so that the apparatus becomes an end in itself. There is the fullest orchestration, complete three-dimensionality, perfect roundness of form modelled in colour, light and shade, extensive use of perspective, although not properly co-ordinated; in short, the whole arsenal of the painter displayed with such perfection that the artists of successive centuries have found new equipment there whenever they needed some. It must be noted that the painters who executed these murals with which more or less all the better Roman and Greek houses seem to have been decorated, may have been very ordinary artists; but they were craftsmen of the highest order. They display an easy mastery of drawing and painting, a boldness and fluidity of the brush which puts all but the greatest masters of the Renaissance to shame. Apart from the rendering on the wall of well-known masterpieces or other subjects, still-life and landscape, very much like easel paintings linked up by decorative schemes of imitation marble, garlands of flowers or other ornaments, they invented most complicated, witty and elegant ways of enlarging rooms by means of painted windows, loggias, pillars, a whole sham architecture with innumerable openings into the distance. We shall see how this device was taken up again in the late Baroque and carried to its greatest triumph by Tiepolo.

The conventions and technique of Greco-Roman painting, born out of the antique Pagan civilization, were carried on for some time after that world had died, but eventually underwent significant changes under the impact of the more primitive Barbarian and early Christian forces. In a gradual process of retrogression occasioned by the revolutionary changes of the period, the influx of the Orient, the replacement of the original population by barbarian newcomers in the West and by sophisticated ones in the East, art was completely changed. The rich language shrinks, the artist can no longer handle the complicated means; richness of detail, exact rendering, truth to nature, are no longer his aim; he strives for monumentality and supernatural expression.

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Colour is simplified, light and shade schematized, conventions are established which become more and more rigid and remote from reality. Shadows withdraw to the outer edge of the form and become outlines; modelling in colour disappears; figures and draperies are stylized. Space flattens out and architectural or landscape backgrounds shrink to a simple indication of locality. Eventually almost complete flatness is reached with colour simply filled in between more or less ornamental outlines. The Oriental gift for sumptuous decoration soon got hold of this simple scheme and developed it into the Byzantine style in all its majestic splendour, a style eminently suited to interpret the colourful and ceremonious religion in which the Imperial Court and Heaven became practically one and the same thing. This mixture of pomp and severity is expressed in the rigid composition which as a rule is symmetrical, the centre of the picture holding the most important figure, which is sometimes emphasized by its size, while the rest are aligned on either side, spread out evenly, of equal height, thereby giving an impression of gravity and monumentality. If several rows of figures are shown they are frequently lined up above each other, in parallel rows.

The outline, which hardly exists in Greco-Roman painting, now becomes the main carrier of expression. It runs round the figures, binding all parts into a rhythmical flow, washing away all naturalistic details, stressing and typifying all salient features, bringing limbs, hair, clothing into the same calligraphic movement. Everything is disembodied, becomes an ornament, figures float on a flat background. Colour is hardly varied within the outlines of a given form; it is no longer representational, but symbolical and decorative. But it also develops a certain quality of which I shall speak later, of being able to take on, when applied flat on an empty background, a tremendous depth, the infinite. It is here that we first come upon this phenomenon that the flat wall, without any intimation of perspective, can be made to suggest immense space, and this in a way which does not interfere with its character as a wall. The flat blue background of a Byzantine cupola is without a doubt the sky, and a very much deeper and more transcendental one than, say, Mantegna's, with its beautifully gradated colour and little clouds. In contrast to the Greco-Roman three-dimensional mural, we have here the prototype of the flat one which has appeared often in history and is much in use again in our day. In fact, it seems almost as if modern architects and painters knew of no other way or considered

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it the only suitable one for modern buildings; I hope, however, to prove that this is not the case.

Space does not permit me to go into the curious development of Byzantine painting and its culmination in Russia in the ikon. It seems as if this whole school of painters had once and for all withdrawn from nature and from any outside influence. Within their tradition, firmly established and adhered to with fanatical, almost hysterical rigidity, they go through various stages of ripening and declining, giving up the severe heroic simplicity for a richer, more agitated and complicated style, growing more refined and elegant, and finally dying in empty formalism. Light and shade are introduced, figures are arranged in groups, and an attempt is made to create space by the suggestion of several planes behind each other on which the figures move, and there is a recession in size towards the back. To what beauty Byzantine painting could rise in its own way is not sufficiently appreciated generally; nor are its later developments known here. I therefore reproduce a most remarkable mural from Mistra, of the 15th century, which, in the centre figure, curiously echoes a classical past, while it otherwise shows how much El Greco owed to his native country.

Western Europe went a different way. In both civilizations art was devoted entirely to the service of religion, but whereas the Eastern artists follow an established way for the representation of heavenly splendour, their Western disciples soon strive for a freer and more personal style. They give up the hieratic stiffness of Byzantine, their visionary quality strikes us as more immediate; greater freedom and variety of form in the expression of the artist's thought appear, although there is as yet little interest in nature. The lines of the painting flow more freely, they are broken, they swell and decrease, are delicate or strong and, although the outline remains the dominant factor for a long time yet, giving rhythm and dynamic quality, a certain amount of plastic value is developed. Roundness is evolved through colour which becomes fuller and is applied in several shades, but remains mostly decorative and symbolical. The figure of St. Paul, from St. Anselm's Chapel, Canterbury, is an excellent example of this style.

It is interesting to note in this painting that, while the garments, flowing in smooth, parallel folds round egg-shaped nodules, are still stylized in Byzantine fashion, the free, purposeful movement of the body and particu-

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larly the firm stance on the left foot, already give an indication of future West-European development. The Chichester Roundel, one of the most exquisite examples of early English work, shows even greater freedom and naturalness.

Gradually the mural painting develops a certain depth, about as much as a relief would have, with stronger plastic quality in the figures, which are now arranged behind each other, and with wing-like pieces of architecture or landscape arranged in horizontal bands. Cimabue, Duccio and Giotto bring about this change. But while the first two still live in the dream-like world of the Byzantines, Giotto is the first to create that firm, tangible construction which finally grew into the Renaissance picture. It is a matter of opinion whether this step should be looked upon as a decline or a new dawn in art. Before him, the figures float in a transcendental immeasurable space; they might be near or far from us, but they live in their own mysterious world of pure being. With Giotto everything becomes dramatic action, played under our eyes and for us, in a clear-cut, measurable space. The mystery recedes; but the creation is superb and his mural paintings are perhaps the greatest and most consciously achieved in history. There is a new strength and simplicity in his drawing as against the sophistication of the Byzantines and a most virile and painter-like handling of the colour, a broad modelling instead of their hard brittleness. His study of nature serves only to give firmness and weight to the form. The bodies are round, but there is still a feeling of flatness about them which keeps them well in the wall. The outline still dominates the figures and the composition, but it is no longer a calligraphic line; it has now, one might say, a three-dimensional quality; what it surrounds, becomes a body. It is, in a way mastered again only by Picasso, of almost geometrical simplicity and at the same time of material tangibility. This strong geometrical quality in Giotto, apparent also in his modelling which tends to shape heads and limbs into spheres and cylinders, is one of his great assets as a mural painter, as it is with these elements that the architect works. The firm stance of his figures, their outstanding plastic quality and firmness are most wonderfully balanced by the strong action of the composition. The movement is always an upwards or sideways one, it never goes from front to back. Only his architecture sometimes lacks co-ordination and throws a slight feeling of uneasiness into his work, particularly where his paintings are lined up in parallel rows, as in the Arena

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Chapel at Padua. The compositional scheme of the flat painting in this, its most developed stage, is shown in the Fresco by Andrea da Firenze in the Spanish Chapel at Florence. The figures are grouped with great freedom, but arranged in horizontal bands; the effect of the whole is as of a house with people moving on different floors, a conception expressing to perfection the contemporary picture of the world, built up towards heaven in innumerable planes.

I cannot help dwelling on this point a little longer. The paintings of this period have a greatness of form and expression, a forcefulness and truth, and at the same time an unerring rightness as mural paintings, such as we shall not find combined again. For this reason in addition to a detail from 'The Last Judgement,' I have arranged to reproduce here the whole of Orcagna's 'Triumph of Death' in the Campo Santo at Pisa, a work that after every visit over many years left a deeper impression on me, but which, I hear, has now to a considerable extent fallen a victim to the ravages of war. I hope I shall not be misunderstood. If I stress the importance and beauty of these paintings, it is not because I think modern artists should imitate them. It is only to point out that mural painting, while keeping entirely within its own limits and acknowledging the claims of the architect, can rise to a strength and autonomy of expression such as are often denied it by the theorists. I should like to shake up both architects and painters to overcome the anaemia and whimsicality that have become a characteristic of mural painting, or, at any rate, to keep them in their place in ladies' drawing-rooms and nurseries; but to let churches be decorated by such men as Georges Rouault or Graham Sutherland, in whom there is fire. If I think of the examples of modern church decoration shown by one of our most eminent architects a short while ago, the tired, simpering, affected bits of painting or sculpture, I still shudder.

Much of the exquisite and charming work done by artists after Giotto I shall reluctantly pass over and only stop again at Masaccio, who is of the rugged grandeur and simplicity of Orcagna, but in his forms, his depth of space and use of light and shade, points the way to much later developments. There is, in fact, a tragic quality, a loneliness, a mysterious play of shadows in his frescoes that links him more to Michelangelo than to any of the intervening periods. Piero della Francesca's frescoes in Arezzo belong to the last period of the flat mural; that is to say, a painting the main movement of which runs parallel to the wall and not into it. His frescoes are fundamentally built on the same

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principle but they do not use the outline to keep the rounded form in place. Instead there is a most subtle play of different tones of light and shade, very delicately gradated, which gives the whole painting a relief-like movement, a gentle waving along the surface, whereby objects in the foreground and in the background balance each other. Even Titian's paintings in Padua are still to be reckoned as a very late example of the flat mural. The figures are ranged along the wall, the landscape is merely indicated. But here once more the outline, or rather the silhouette, is the carrier of the composition, which has a strong architectural quality and some of that geometrical firmness found underlying all Titian's work.

We must now turn our attention to another kind of mural painting, grown step by step out of the former, so gradually that it might be taken for a further development if the consequences had not shown it to aim at something quite different. The aim, in fact, is no longer that of clothing the wall like a tapestry, but of breaking through it and creating an imaginary space beyond. The preoccupation with perspective, the roundness of bodies and their projection into space had become so strong that the completely three-dimensional picture was eventually the outcome. At the same time the wall as aesthetic element of the building had begun to lose in importance, while the structural preponderance of pillars, arches and vaults was more and more stressed. It was therefore quite natural that the space within this framework could be widened out into the semblance of greater distance. So we come to the mural that has all its movement running into the picture or out of it, creating a depth of space into which the eye can travel. It begins, through the application of proper linear perspective, with a unification of the architectural elements in the picture. The space thus added to the real room grows gradually; beginning with niches and shallow rooms running along the real one, as for instance in Ghirlandajo's 'Last Supper,' then deepening into the wedge-like shape of Leonardo's, and finally stretching right into the open.

Mantegna probably was the first deliberately to aim at the complete space creation, and the tremendous effort of his striving is very visible in all his works. Architecture, landscape, figures, all are subjected to the most rigorous application of the laws of perspective. Starting on the level of the wall with his figures and buildings, he pushes them into the distance, proceeding from one detail to the next; figures, draperies, pillars, arches, each thing sharply drawn and

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modelled, further and further away. Even the sky is taken into this movement and covered with clouds all clearly outlined, receding towards the horizon. This new conception of the mural at once threw up some serious problems that had not existed before. It turned out that the painted architecture easily clashed with that of the real room. If the painted one should appear to full advantage, the spectator would have to stand in the proper axis of the perspective. If the painting was placed high up on a wall, the unpleasant effect of the painting sliding down towards the back was created, as in Mantegna's painting in the Eremitani Chapel at Padua. This defect was overcome by the creation of an imaginary eye level higher up. Then the depth of the picture had to be proportionate to that of the room; a shallow room could not be extended very far. Also, while it had been perfectly satisfying to paint several pictures of the earlier kind next to or above each other, this practice had unfortunate results with three-dimensional murals, and it is to be regretted that it was carried on for a long time. Ghirlandajo's frescoes in S. Maria Novella in Florence must be a great disappointment to everybody seeing them for the first time *in situ*. While each picture by itself is an admirable creation, firm in drawing and composition, and, although slightly dry, has the necessary monumental qualities of the mural, the fact remains that each is a separate unit with a perspective of its own, its own space, vanishing point and architecture, and therefore cancels the others out. An unpleasant effect as of rows of cavities dug into the wall is created, a most confusing and distressing spectacle. If the earlier painters of space-creating murals had often crowded their work with detailed and fantastic architecture in order to display their command of the new possibilities, and built up their space by leading the eye into it, step by step, later artists simplified their structures and gained greater freedom in the handling of space, leaving out unnecessary intermediate steps and working often with suggestions.

That the three-dimensional mural has to be in perfect harmony with the surrounding architecture is beautifully demonstrated by Leonardo, whose 'Last Supper' not only continues the long walls of the refectory of S. Maria della Grazia at Milan, but the whole composition of which centres towards the middle, the vanishing point. The symmetrical halves are broken up by sub-centres and through these sections flows the most subtle backward and forward movement, all echoing the structural features of the room. But it is Raphael

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who created what are probably the most satisfying examples of the three-dimensional mural in the Stances of the Vatican. He had the advantage of being given a piece of architecture purposely made to receive paintings and so could permit himself to push the walls outward and handle the rooms as he pleased. Even so, he got into some trouble over the windows and his way of working round them is not very convincing, as the real openings and those of his paintings enter into an unpleasant competition. But the School of Athens and the Disputà are perfectly fitted to the structure of the room and open it up in excellent gradations, from group to group of figures, to buildings near and further away, and to the sky at the end. They also form perfect opposites to each other, so that the spectator, standing between them and turning from one to the other, finds the same vanishing point and the same perspective in both and need not make any painful adjustments. Raphael reached a further stage of composition in his Conflagration of the Borgo. While in the School of Athens the accents are evenly distributed and the space built up in parallel horizontal masses, in the later work everything, architecture, figures, the action, is drawn deep into the background, so that the spectator not only registers the depth of space but is made to travel into it.

The fact that Raphael was not always able to unite satisfactorily windows or doors and painting on the same wall, points to some problems which do not exist for the flat mural but which have to be considered in the use of three-dimensional paintings. This does not mean that the two should be mixed in the same room as the occasion arises. The clash between Orcagna's 'Triumph of Death' and Gozzoli's biblical scenes in the Campo Santo at Pisa results mainly out of the discrepancy between the two conventions. It simply means that the space-creating mural, just because of its resemblance to real space, must not be allowed to compete or to be compared with the latter, as any work of art that is naturalistic must never be compared to nature. Three-dimensional painting should therefore never be used where such confusing situations exist, where doors or windows, open air, trees or houses are visible. As a precaution, in order to avoid any unpleasant clash between the painted and the real room, the old masters very carefully surrounded work of this kind with heavy borders, partly painted, partly stuccoed. This created a barrier between the two and at the same time hid the awkward point where they met. The difficulties of the three-dimensional mural are thus clearly formidable; they make one under-

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II. 'ACTORS.' MURAL PAINTING: HERCULANEUM NATIONAL MUSEUM, NAPLES

III. PAINTED ROOM. HOUSE OF THE VETTII. POMPEII

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IV. DETAIL FROM 'THE ASCENSION.' MURAL PAINTING:
CHURCH OF PANTANASSA, MISTRA

V. 'ST. PAUL.' MURAL PAINTING:
ST. ANSELM'S CHAPEL, CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

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VI. GIOTTO. 'THE SCOURGING OF CHRIST' MURAL PAINTING: SCROVEGNI CHAPEL, PADUA

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VII. ANDREA ORCAGNA. DETAIL FROM 'THE LAST JUDGEMENT'

MURAL PAINTING: CAMPO SANTO, PISA

VIII. ANDREA ORCAGNA. 'THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH' MURAL PAINTING: CAMPO SANTO, PISA

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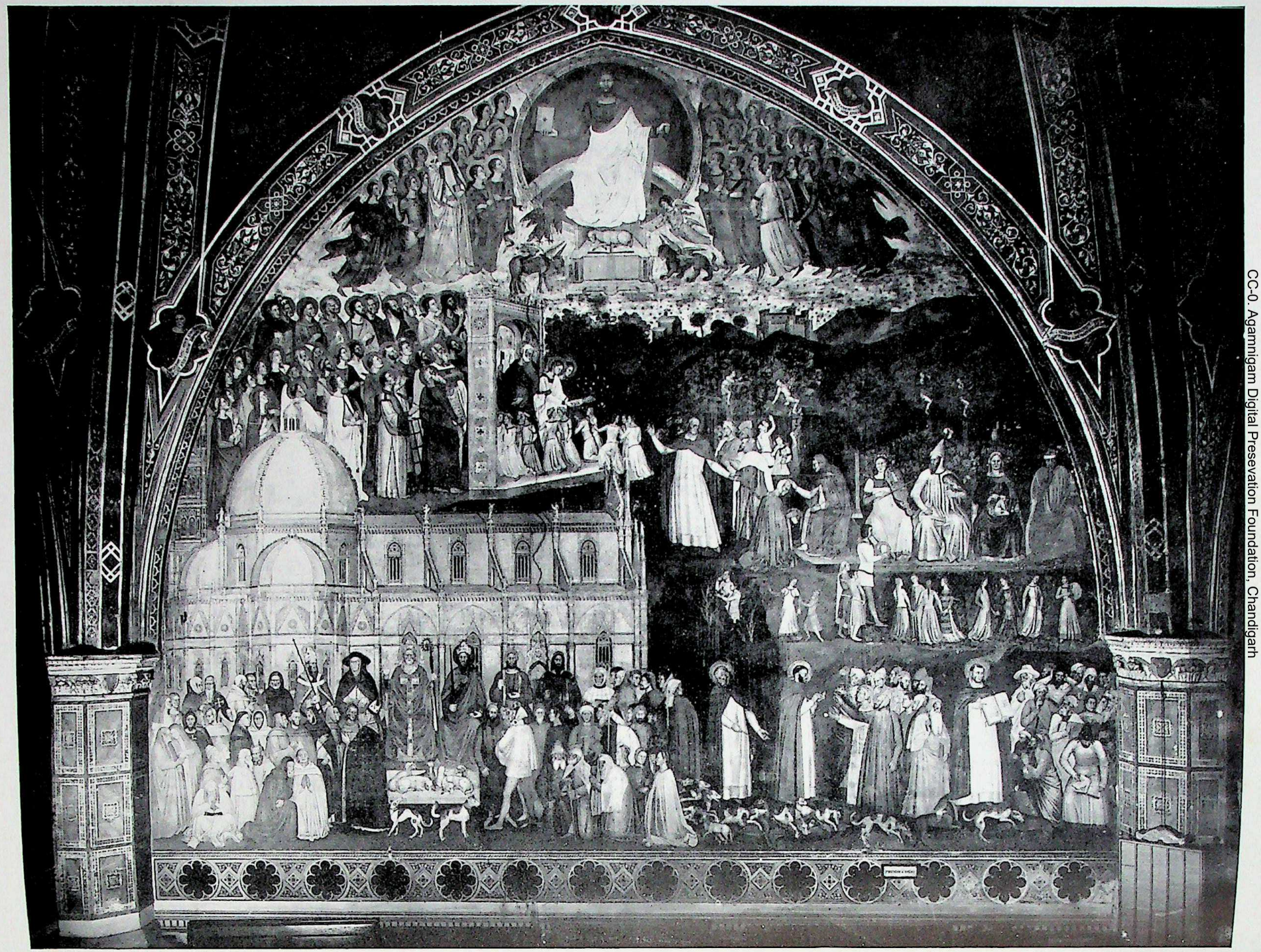

IX. ANDREA DA FIRENZE. 'THE CHURCH MILITANT AND TRIUMPHANT' MURAL PAINTING: SPANISH CHAPEL, *STA. MARIA NOVELLA, FLORENCE*

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X. PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA. DETAIL FROM 'THE BATTLE OF MAXENTIUS' MURAL PAINTING: S. FRANCESCO, AREZZO

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XI. TITIAN. 'ST. ANTONY PERFORMING A MIRACLE' MURAL PAINTING: SCUOLA DEL SANTO, PADUA

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stand why so many paintings, of the highest quality in other aspects, fail to satisfy one in their relationship to the room. One feels in them a tug-o'-war between the painter and the architect, or rather that the painting, adorned with all the knowledge by now accumulated, with perspective and anatomy, perfect roundness of figures and depth of space, has become too overwhelming and self-sufficient to trouble much about the room surrounding it. That applies to such artists as Signorelli or Pinturicchio, and it even holds good for Michel-angelo. Not even the colossal framework he devised for the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel can keep it in its place. It bulges backward and forward and, together with his 'Last Judgement,' bursts right out of the wall and squashes and tears the building. I am, of course, only concerned here with the mural quality of these pictures; whether they have not the right, as outbursts of such cosmic strength, to annihilate every surrounding form is a different question. Only Michelangelo himself could have designed an architecture to contain his paintings. His followers, to whom no such exceptional status can be granted, went on overloading the wall with violent action, heavy modelling and furious counter-movements, ploughing up the surface of their pictures and so creating an effect of discomfort and lack of harmony which makes it difficult to stay in the rooms they adorn. A particular device in three-dimensional painting was, however, developed which had been used by Mantegna and Masaccio and was used now with supreme mastery by Tintoretto: the asymmetrical room, where the receding lines of perspective converge not towards the centre, but to one side of the picture. It was Tintoretto who saw the emotional possibilities in this shifting of the balance, which turns a static picture into a moving one, permitting an action to run right through diagonally from back to front, or vice versa, and thus sucking the spectator into it or blowing the picture out at him. The dangerous point of this device is that the space created is shallow on one side of the wall and deep on the other, and can only be used under special structural conditions. Nevertheless, because of its emotional quality which can be turned to propaganda uses, it is one of the few potentialities of the Baroque used by modern artists.

The many other inventions of Baroque and Rococo periods which brought a new flowering of mural painting, are unfortunately misunderstood and neglected to-day.

It cannot be decided whether architectural changes brought fresh ideas into

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painting or whether the painter's influence loosened up architecture; at any rate the two drew together more closely than ever before. The Baroque, which tried once again what had been achieved by the Gothic, to form the world with its innumerable activities into one religious structure, blew its sultry, stormy breath into all the arts and swept them along, overrunning all barriers, uniting all the separate elements into one big ascending movement. In the desire to bring all parts of the building into the most intimate relationship with each other, a fluid composition is created in which nothing is there for its own sake but only as contributing to the general effect. Curves appear everywhere; straight lines are broken up or bent; scrolls and volutes twirl upward; church façades undulate; a general flowing movement takes hold of architecture and opens its walls and ceilings to the Infinite; there is a tremendous surge towards heaven. But while Gothic architecture contains this upward move within its pointed roofs and arches, the Baroque reaches out into infinite space, its architecture melting away into the sky and, in order to continue this ascending motive beyond the limitations of stone and mortar, the help of the painter has to be engaged. We have here, for the first time, an architectural style not only willing to bear painting as an ornament or as a help for specified purposes, but needing it out of an innermost necessity, an inability to fulfil itself alone without the assistance of an illusionist art. It was the painter's duty to link up this outward reaching gesture with the Infinite into which it stretched with the cloud perspective of heaven. In order to achieve this, both arts have to give up some of their independence. The painting no longer has a separate life, that completeness in itself which excludes the spectator and keeps the picture apart from the room, even where it is joined on to it by the perspective. The room has to be so constructed as to make all movement flow towards the picture, where it is taken up and carried on into the furthest distance visible. That is to say, the architect relies on the effects of the painting from the beginning, and probably works out the whole scheme of building and decorating beforehand with the painter. The latter, in his turn, gives up the self-sufficiency and independent attitude of the Renaissance painter and tones down his figures for the sake of the space composition. This can be directed either horizontally against the walls or vertically against the ceiling. An instance of the first is Veronese, in whose pictures the main action and the single figures have lost some of their importance for the sake of the general movement of the masses and the vast

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arrangement of architecture and sky. There are, of course, a great number of strongly characterized, very individual and beautifully painted figures in his murals, grouped together very skilfully. But these figures or groups of figures have somehow lost substance, carry less momentum than, say, those of Titian and, a thing quite impossible in any of the latter's pictures, they could be altered in position, added to or decimated without great loss to the whole. On the other hand, there is a broad flow of painting, and the gradual recession into the distance of human beings and architecture is managed so grandly and freely with tone and colour changes that it makes, for instance, Mantegna's complicated perspectives look very laboured.

Another artist who understands the conditions of this sort of painting most wonderfully is Tiepolo, and his frescoes in the Palazzo Labia at Venice are, to me, one of the highlights of Baroque art. This last great mural painter took, as I have mentioned before, one of the Pompeian inventions and adapted it to his own use. The art of opening up the walls by covering them with a maze of architectural fantasies in which near and distant parts alternate continuously, was practised in a small and dainty way by the Romans. Tiepolo infused it with the strong breath of the Baroque. He not only painted architecture on the walls, he completely transformed the four walls into outside ones, into façades of fantastic buildings with openings everywhere, and it is behind these that the action of his pictures, the Banquet of Cleopatra and her Embarkation, takes place, so that we see it all cut up by the pillars, arches and balustrades in the foreground, and rounded off in the background by more buildings corresponding to the first ones and opening up backwards again to the sky. The whole outer scene is flooded with sunshine and an incredible airy gayness and festivity. The compositional scheme is carried over the whole room with perfect consequence, and all the walls and the ceiling are completely covered with painting. Nevertheless, there is none of the oppressiveness of many Renaissance decorations; on the contrary, the room widens out very lightly and with great elegance, and the whole delicate effect is brought about by the wonderful draughtsmanship and construction and by the superb handling of the fresco technique. Here, indeed, is the culmination of a tradition many centuries old. I hope I shall be forgiven if I talk about Tiepolo a little longer. The reasons, I must confess, are purely personal ones. Tiepolo's painting on the huge ceiling in the staircase of the episcopal palace at Würzburg is the first mural painting I

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ever saw; I was a half-grown boy at the time and the impression was deep and lasting. The stairs, real Baroque, wide and ornamented, run up in several flights crossing each other to a gallery leading all the way round; the whole is in white stucco and red marble. There is a very heavy, elaborate cornice with life-size statues of reclining and flying figures, with plaster draperies and ornaments and, apparently rising upward from it but really painted on the ceiling, there is a big balustrade over which hang and behind which are piled up innumerable figures, animals, trees and the tops of buildings, all strongly foreshortened. The wealth of detail, of strange costumes, beautiful materials, rare animals and plants, is only equalled by the virtuosity and lightness with which all this is rendered. Above it there rises an evening sky with grey, pink and yellow clouds peopled with floating gods and goddesses and an Apollo in his chariot, seen right from underneath, with horses rearing and showing their round bellies. The whole thing not in the least pompous or ponderous, as it might easily have been, but graceful and in colours as delicate and light as pastel. All one has to do is to lean back and let one's eye be drawn higher and higher up into the clouds.

In mentioning this last work I have come to the realm where Baroque and Rococo celebrated their greatest triumphs, their innumerable superb ceiling paintings. Ceilings, of course, had been painted for many centuries past, just like walls, and in equally different ways, but they present problems of their own. The question whether to treat them as flat surfaces, as reliefs, as rounded surfaces or as openings involves great differences in execution and some difficulties of the first magnitude. It is clear that a painting poised above one's head must not be weighty if it is not to be oppressive. Also it has no upper and lower part and must be understandable from whichever side it is looked at. These questions were solved by the Byzantine and pre-Renaissance artists by painting their figures or scenes flat on the ceiling and arranging them in concentric circles. Sometimes they cut up the surface by diagonal lines, using the base of each thus created triangle as the bottom of a separate picture. This works beautifully as long as painting has no realistic tendencies. As soon as bodies become round and perspective is introduced, the difficulties begin. Some artists simply ignore them and paint on the ceiling as they would on the wall, a picture to be looked at from one side of the room only; Raphael's ceilings in the Villa Farnese in Rome or Reni's Aurora in the Casino

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Rospigliosi in the same city. This has always seemed to me an unsatisfactory and unstructural way, as it suggests a sort of bending of space. Other painters anchor their scenes around the sides and let them grow towards the centre. Others again cover the whole with separate medallions, while Michelangelo cuts up the ceiling of the Sistine into many small pictures. All these solutions can be made bearable by tactful handling, light colour and forms that are not overwhelming. But I confess to preferring the more consequent way of Mantegna, Correggio and the Baroque painters. If a room is treated as a framework, with space opening out through the walls and through the ceiling, then it is most disconcerting to find things standing upright in the first and horizontally in the second. Mantegna was the first to see that the same treatment should be used in both cases and that everything on the ceiling would have to stand upward too. Hence his painting on a ceiling in the Castello di Corte at Mantua of a balustrade opening up towards the sky, with cupids bending over it and looking down. This idea of the architecture continuing upward was brought to perfection by the Baroque and Rococo artists. It corresponded exactly to their needs; they used it incessantly and with an amount of ingenious variation that shows how much it must have delighted them. In these orgies of ascending galleries, pillars and pinnacles, flying saints and angels, opening clouds and innermost heavens, both architects and painters gave themselves up to mystical ecstasies and dreams that went far beyond anything that could be built in earthly materials. A tremendous force drove the structure up to meet these fantastic flights of clouds, and in these endless vistas, beginning with the real room surrounding him, the spectator not only experienced strong religious emotions but felt himself drawn upward in an awareness of space all round him that came near to flying. It is this incredible power of creating a movement in space which I want the reader to notice in Baroque art, because I think that its principle, not its Baroque form, could be adapted most strikingly to the decoration of an architecture as conscious of its deployment in space as our own today. Baroque ceilings, unfortunately, lend themselves badly to reproduction; their colour, lightness and effervescent quality cannot be transmitted. However, I show here Tiepolo's ceiling in Würzburg, and one of the innumerable Tyrolese church interiors; of these there are hundreds vying with each other for richness of invention and detail, and for gay harmony of architecture, sculpture and painting.

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With the Baroque and Rococo artists mural painting reached a last, stupendous height, a perfection based on such all-embracing knowledge and craftsmanship and on such feverish, keyed-up emotion that the standard could not be kept up for a long time. As in Antique art, all resources are used with the greatest virtuosity; there is the same easy handling of all difficulties; a thousand different things are portrayed, with every richness of detail, in every possible position or light; and all are united into the same easy flow of composition, revealing in their creator an ability to organize and an amount of stamina that are hard for us even to realize. To this has to be added what can really only be appreciated in the original, the beautiful handling of the fresco technique and the resulting luminosity and powdery quality of the surface.

When exhaustion comes and reaction sets in, the reaction of a new age of virtuous classicality, mural painting loses its great conception of three-dimensional movement and, with that, all its inner life. Henceforth it will play with the forms of the past, Renaissance or Gothic, but without understanding of the particular structure behind each. As this is not a history of mural painting, there is no need here to go into whatever interesting individual achievements may have been made; they do not present any fundamental developments. Puvis de Chavannes, the first to realize again that the problem of space is the most important one to be tackled, before questions of subject or of style can be thought of, unfortunately confined himself to the almost flat, and thereby forced a one-sided development upon us from which we have not yet shaken ourselves free.

Here I ought to begin a survey of the manifold types of modern murals. I feel, however, that this means entering also into a discussion of the new conceptions of space and form on which some of them are based, and that it might be better to break off here in order to make some general remarks on mural painting and gather up what conclusions we can draw so far. We shall find that there are many which we can carry across the gap and which are applicable to our own work.

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III

Lessons from the Past

WHEN approaching a new discipline it is always good to find out the aims first. These, in our case, are all concerned with the embellishment of the room by painting and with creating unity between a room and what may be called for lack of a better word its decoration. The painting is not to be added as an afterthought, or an ornament to be dispensed with at a pinch. It should be an integral part of the architecture, the conclusion and highlight of the room's features and a logical consequence of its structure. This is a task requiring much tact from the painter and a willingness to look beyond the immediate confines of his work. The painter of easel pictures is used to develop all his problems within the picture frame and to settle them there. He creates his own space without any reference to the outer one, whereas the mural painter creates out of the space of the room surrounding him. He must give up the idea of using the room as a background on which to display his art with complete freedom; he must learn not to contravene the tendencies of the architect. This seems an easy and obvious request, but it has often been grossly violated in the past and in our time by otherwise excellent artists who seemed unable to understand the structure of the room and the particular walls on which they worked. It must be realized that two separate processes have to be fused; the space-shaping one of the architect and the picture-shaping one of the painter, and that the painter has to take up the architect's intention as the ground motive on which to develop his own work. The architect surrounds an empty space with walls and a roof. This he can do in different ways: he can either build this shell out of more or less equal components which by sticking together hold themselves up and carry their own weight and that of the roof; or he can set up a framework to carry the weight and fill in the sides with a thin skin. The difference between these two types of wall, the carrying and the clothing one, is of the greatest importance in shaping the

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building and therefore the mural painting too. Different periods in architecture stress one or the other of these methods. Some give the wall full weight and the importance of an essential element. In that case it has to be respected by the painter, and all his work should merely clothe it like a tapestry and not break through it. The wall in its entirety expresses the architect's idea here. A room of this sort is static, self-contained within its walls, not reaching outward; all movement in the picture should therefore run in the plane of the wall, up, downwards, or sideways, but not into or out of it. This, we have found, can be done either by a completely flat style or by a relief-like modelling of the surface. The means at our disposal are, in the first case, the outline, an extremely flexible and expressive thing controlling movement and rhythm, and flat colour which, besides creating different degrees of depth, has a strong symbolical and emotional quality. In the next stage we have, not light and shade, but a decorative equivalent, as addition. If a modern simile to the first can be found in Matisse's large compositions like 'The Dance' or 'Music,' the second can be likened to some of Picasso's work, where a body, sharply defined by an outline, is divided into a lighter and a darker part and thereby gives the impression of not being flat. Next comes relief-like roundness, with or without outlines, but with a certain amount of real modelling in colour as in Picasso's Grecian period.

Examples of these tendencies we have seen in Byzantine and pre-Renaissance art. On the other hand, there is the type of architecture carried by a framework, by pillars, girders, arcs or vaults, where, although the architect is forced, for practical reasons, to fill in the space between these main elements by walls, they are not integral parts of the structure and therefore can be dealt with more freely. In fact the architect is often glad to have them dissolved by the painter. A room of this kind has a tendency to push outward, to open out between its framework, so that it is the task of the painter to create additional space there. This, as we have seen, is done by means of perspective, with line, colour or light. Bodies assume an aspect of complete roundness, with the help of strong shading and foreshortening. Every device is used to give the illusion of the figures being detached from the background. The preoccupation with plastic qualities has, however, the danger of lowering the interest in colour, as can be seen in the later Florentine work. We have found that the three-dimensional mural can only be used in special circumstances; not next to

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doors or windows, or in the open, because artificial and real space clash badly. Also it requires the most careful adjustment of its perspective to the features of the room and to the position of the spectator. Once these requirements are understood, it should be of the greatest interest to the modern architect by its power to break up a wall which might be annoying in its solidity.

The method employed need not be as strictly traditional as, say, in Rex Whistler's beautiful and elegant murals which are the most consequent contemporary realizations of the three-dimensional style. The same sensation of depth and enlargement of the room could be created with abstract elements, in the style of John Tunnard for example, whose mural Focal Point seems to me one of the very best our time has produced; it has a profound spiritual quality far beyond the decorative effect which so often is the only asset of a wall painting. If I mention these two extremes, it is simply to detach the reader's mind from the period language and contents and make him see the purely formal constituents underneath, which are as valuable to-day as when they were invented. And that, to my mind, is the case also with the Baroque which invented the movement through space of architecture and picture combined. Although I personally love them, there is no need to think of saints, angels and clouds or religious emotion. There is, I think, an emotional element which cannot be detached, but it is perhaps only that of joyful movement, and that is certainly an eminent characteristic of our own architecture. To a type of building that abhors massive forms, that reduces even the framework to a skeleton-like thinness and becomes almost pure composition in space, a form of painting which can continue this movement on the necessarily opaque walls ought to be welcome. To anybody countering this argument by a reference to the modern glass wall, semi- or completely transparent, as the proper expression of modern building, I should like to say that not only are there practical reasons which very often necessitate the construction of an opaque wall, but that to most human beings it would be distressing not to be shut off from the outer world sometimes, and that the mural painting opens a spiritual infinity, not a real one. It is a special characteristic of Baroque and Rococo murals, unfortunately one that can only be appreciated on the spot, that they are not only painted in a very light key, but seem to be actually radiating light. There are, of course, explanations for this phenomenon, the masterly handling of the fresco technique and the clever direction of light onto the pictures; but the fact

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remains that the rooms containing these paintings are suffused by a pure light which makes the modern type of light room, windows half round and the rest whitewashed, look not light, but only dazzling. The confusion that sometimes exists on this point among architects was clearly demonstrated to me in the photograph of a modern Swiss church, where the desire for light had prompted the architect to build his walls of glass bricks. The impression created is one of terrible restlessness; instead of an inner luminosity created by colour and well-placed windows, we get ever-changing reflections and distortions from the outside, from sky, houses, people in the street. But I have overstepped the range of this chapter, which was only meant to extract what formal principles we could from the different styles of the past. We have found some useful ones, and I think that particularly the Baroque invention of infinite space and closest cohesion between architecture and painting deserves attention.

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IV

Modern Painting

THE time has now come to go into the elements of modern mural work as developed after the great break in the tradition. In order to do this we shall have to look further afield and consider painting in general since the last decades of the 19th century. Many of the canvases done by the protagonists of the new movements would have made admirable murals; or rather their creators could have become mural painters of the first order. But they were revolutionaries; neither architects nor public understood their aims till much later, and so they were not given a chance.

Attempts to regain simplicity and monumentality go back to Puvis de Chavannes. In his mural paintings he stressed horizontal and vertical lines, eliminated deep shadows and drew the various planes of his picture together by an even lightness of tone and of colour. Different means were used by Hans von Marées; he created a rich texture of deep colours in incessant interplay from front to back, so that his highly plastic figures are wrapped into an equally rounded background. But it is a later generation of artists which really began the modern movement, and amongst them we must distinguish two different trends which we may call, for simplicity's sake, the romantic and the constructive. Both contributed to the rejuvenation of painting in their own sphere and the influence of both is alive to-day. The Impressionists, in trying to express light through colour, concentrated on the latter as no other painters had ever done, with the result of producing an unending range of beautiful and delicate colours and harmonies. They completely altered our sense of colour and sharpened our eyes to the subtleties of relationship between the various objects in a picture. The Venetians, great colourists though they were, cannot hold their own against a Degas or Renoir for variety of tone and sensuous beauty of surface. These riches of colour, which the Impressionists used in their pursuit of fleeting atmospheric effects and the bizarre patterns of

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casual happenings, were transformed into something quite different in the hands of a group of artists who called themselves the 'Fauves' and who were not satisfied with a surface luminosity and iridescence but aimed at the expression of their emotions. Influenced by Rodin's passionate and flowing drawings, they worked in agitated and strongly rhythmical outlines and the new colours which they deepened and enriched. They reduced the forms of nature to great simplicity, using often an outline only, and gave themselves up to a cult of glowing, intense colour, not shrinking from harsh and brutal effects. It is a significant fact that Impressionists and Fauves are stimulated by the flat colour and extravagant outlines of the Japanese woodcut, while the followers of Cézanne, the other branch of modern art, undergo for some time the influence of African sculpture, its severe lines, geometrical shapes and eminent plastic quality. The greatest representative of the Fauves is Matisse; his early work combines a beautifully sensitive, arabesque-like line with strong colour, applied completely flat. In these very large paintings, figure compositions, interiors or still-life, the most rigorous economy of means is combined with great luxuriance; Oriental splendour goes with the most accurate and intelligent selection; flat colour patches have the uncanny power of representing any object, and the same shade of blue or pink can be made to look very distant or right in the foreground. The mysterious quality of pure colour to suggest various degrees of depth has been developed to the highest degree by Matisse, so that although his early paintings are without any trace of modelling or perspective, they invite the eye to travel deep into them. For enriching a wall which does not require any three-dimensional treatment or strongly structural scheme, no better decoration than this kind can be found, an arrangement of large and small areas of strong or delicate colours, held together by an outline. It must be stated, however, that a mural painting in this manner is a most difficult thing to achieve. Because of its apparent simplicity it has attracted many minor artists who have brought discredit upon it by the mechanical application of their colours, by bad draughtsmanship and insensitive lines, by clumsiness and vulgarity, which are less easy to hide here than in any other type of mural. It really requires a rare feeling for colour and mature knowledge in handling, great freedom in drawing which can only be the outcome of great mastery, and an inborn sensitiveness and tact which have to do duty for hard and fast rules. No colour schemes worked out according to this or that system are any

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good here. They may be useful enough where colour is not the main factor; here only inborn feeling, systematically trained and refined for years, can be sufficient. If Matisse is the main exponent of two-dimensional painting in France, and not to be surpassed in the light, intelligent, decisive handling of his means, Duncan Grant has created some beautiful work of similar tendencies over here, such as the two panels for the *Queen Mary* of which one is reproduced in this book. His painting is always spontaneous and full of vigour, whether his murals lie flat on the wall or form niches in it, and both he and Vanessa Bell have achieved a colourful, rich texture against which much of the younger artists' work looks thin and dry. In Ivon Hitchens we have another painter whose colour is outstandingly beautiful, varied and deep, and whose decorative gift should make him a mural painter of the first degree.

We have found in the more emotional two-dimensional colour-mural an exquisite but difficult means, to be handled only with consummate art.

When we turn, however, to the constructive branch of modern art development, we shall find tendencies which lend themselves better to a proper working discipline and which will lead us a long way towards the cross-roads where we shall meet modern architecture. The beginning of these constructive aims goes back to Cézanne, who was a contemporary of the Impressionists and in many ways, such as in his colour range and surface beauty, talked the same language. His aims, on the other hand, were vastly different; to rebuild the solidity of the picture, to reorganize the composition, to eliminate all incidental things, to tighten up the relationship between the various parts; such were his objects. With the help of innumerable horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines and curves, he bound everything together into a most coherent and static unity. He rediscovered Giotto's way of transforming every object into a stereometric body, a sphere, cylinder or cube, and so achieved his strong architectural quality. It is difficult to say what had the greater influence on art after him, this predilection for structure and cubic forms, or his habit of detaching the means of expression from the object of representation, so that the treatment of a still-life becomes the same, in rhythm, composition, colour and intensity, as that of a human figure. It all helped to make the painter conscious of his art; he shook himself increasingly free from the preoccupation with nature; his representational ambitions shrank to a minimum; he felt himself at liberty to re-examine his aims and the means at his disposal, the possibilities of line, tone, warm and

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cold colour, and he was given the simple elements out of which to build a new world.

In his last water-colours Cézanne had come to the verge of abstract designing; his followers, the cubists, took up this tendency and used it, first to split up the forms of nature, then to forge an arsenal of new, non-representational elements, and finally to create out of these a fresh unity. They seized upon his preference for cubic forms as the basic shapes with which to build, and out of these and circles, squares and triangles constructed their pictures. It is not my intention to go into the various phases of cubism; speaking in general it can be said to have provided a useful discipline by which to regain some of painting's early austerity and clarity. By restricting their colour schemes to a few earthy tones, by the use of geometrical forms, by concentrating on the simple organization of plastic values, these artists gained a certain grandeur and purity which were badly needed in an art saturated with every possible effect and trick. Unfortunately, cubism did not long remain a group movement although it had evolved a common language and high aims. After a short number of years it split into a great variety of trends and individual personalities. Some continued in the pursuit of abstract art as pure construction, and so found their way gradually across to architecture; others wandered off into the dream world of surrealism. Of those still carrying on abstract painting in this country, I should call John Tunnard, whose art contains elements of both varieties, the one most clearly gifted as a mural painter because of his structural and space-shaping qualities.

Other former members of the cubist movement started soon to reintroduce forms of nature. Some went very far indeed in rebuilding a representational world with the new means; none further, perhaps, than Derain. In his ascetic range of colour, usually confined to grey, brown and russet shades, with his superb draughtsmanship, restrained to the simplest lines, he has painted large figure compositions which rank in greatness of conception and uncompromising firmness with any early Italian. It is not astonishing that mural painting of the last fifteen years has been greatly under his influence, particularly in Latin countries where monumentality and severity of form are easily understood. Mexican art in Diego Rivera and Italian painting in such men as Achille Funi show this neo-classical tendency. Much of it, however, including that of Derain himself, seems to me a little too self-conscious and slightly empty.

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Rivera's austerity is really dryness; there is a deadening sameness in his forms and the stroke of his brush; besides, he is overburdened with complicated subject-matter and propaganda. Funi's attitude is too heroic and smacks of Fascism, but he is an excellent craftsman and handles the difficult fresco technique with great skill. There is one artist in this country who has brought these severe neo-classical forms to life. Bernard Meninsky combines truly great draughtsmanship with a simple, moving poetical quality. His figure compositions and ballet designs show that, given the opportunity, he would paint admirable murals.

It is a third group of former cubists who seem to me the most interesting and the most useful as regards the development of mural painting. Picasso, Braque and Gris also brought real objects back into their pictures; but although structural principles always remain very much in evidence, their real aim is lyrical and fantastical. They do not reconstruct nature; they paraphrase it in a poetical way, using just enough to make it recognizable and handling it so as to bring out the qualities that seem to each of them most important. Gris is a delicate and pure lyricist with a great range of tastefully blended colours, Braque an ingenious formalist who creates unending complicated variations on simple themes with extravagant form and reduced but elegant colour. Picasso builds a complete world of his own, fierce, inhuman, with blazing colour and forms that are like chunks of reality, ruthlessly forced together to express his violent and desperate feelings. His 'Guernica,' perhaps the most important work of modern mural art, makes one almost forget the horror and cruelty of the subject over the incisive draughtsmanship, the brutal absence of any softening shadows, and the breaking up of space, flattened out to show both front and back. They all three, Picasso too at that time, use flat colour in the most daring combinations, now bright, now sombre; but while Matisse's bright tones always retain some of the Impressionist's light and vibration, these three use colour deliberately, like house-painters, as a coating. This, as well as the habit of sticking paper or imitation wood veneer on their paintings, or of mixing sand into their paint, points to a tendency to create surfaces of varied texture which are 'real' and contain no illusionary elements. A tendency, by the way, taken up by modern architects who often use side by side materials of different quality, rough and smooth, to break up the monotony of their bare walls. But whatever their surface treatment is like, this group of painters has

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found a way of reuniting both structural and emotional elements and of creating a new language, a new convention for picturing things without actually copying them. Aided by Cézanne's invention of separating drawing from colour, they have evolved a way of using both independently, abstract colour pattern underneath representational outline or vice versa, which permits the artist to establish a proper subject for a painting, to treat it with any degree of emotional emphasis, to keep it at the same time firmly within the structural necessities of the wall, and to create a strong feeling of recession without perspective. These, to my mind, are achievements of the greatest importance for us. A mural painting must mean something; the artist must be able to state his intentions definitely and express his emotions clearly and strongly. At the same time he should not leave the realm of the wall nor attempt to express himself with too much realism. Finally, he may want to create an impression of great depth in space without wishing to establish a completely three-dimensional picture. The means to do all this are here given into his hand. He can draw his subject, as freely or as conventionally as he chooses, calm or wildly agitated. If he now lets his colours, which should of course be suitably chosen, move on the wall in an appropriate rhythm, but as a pattern only, the representational and the structural elements of his work will form a combination of some transparency through which the wall will appear everywhere. The process can be reversed, form and outline carrying the structural, geometrical elements and colour being representational; altogether the very widest possibilities are given for adaptation to one's personal needs.

Having now shown different aesthetic approaches to mural painting derived from the various modern movements, I should like to touch upon a question of the deepest significance, that of a new space feeling. Looking back over our short historical survey, we find that the great changes in style were always characterized by new representations of space. How these, in turn, were the outcome of changing religious and scientific attitudes, this is not the place to discuss. Let us simply state that the Byzantine and mediaeval world, stretched vertically between heaven and earth, was adequately represented in a two-dimensional art. The Renaissance, with interests in all directions, had a clearly modelled three-dimensional space in which every object had its proper place and stability. The Baroque idea was one of movement into infinity. One might say that in the early days space is immeasurable, but only in us; in the Renais-

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XII. ANDREA MANTEGNA. 'ST. JAMES LED TO HIS EXECUTION'

MURAL PAINTING: EREMITANI CHAPEL, PADUA

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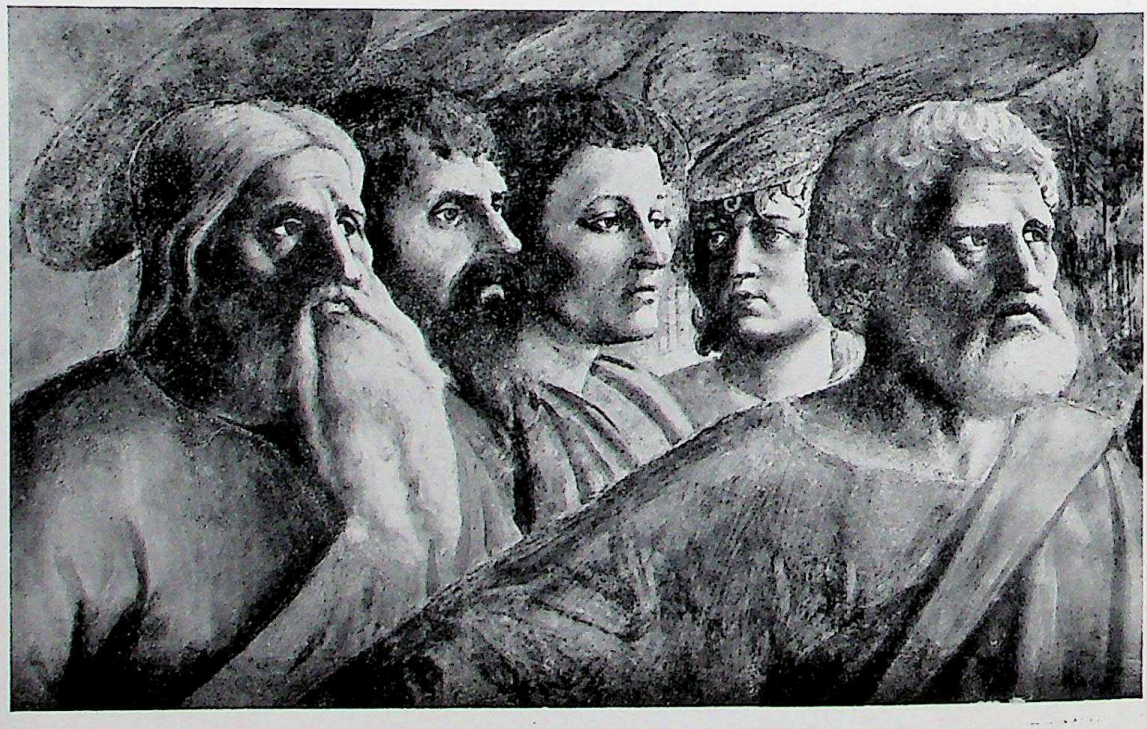
XIII. MASACCIO. 'THE TRIBUTE MONEY'

MURAL PAINTING: STA. MARIA DEL CARMINE, FLORENCE



XIV. DETAIL FROM PLATE XIII

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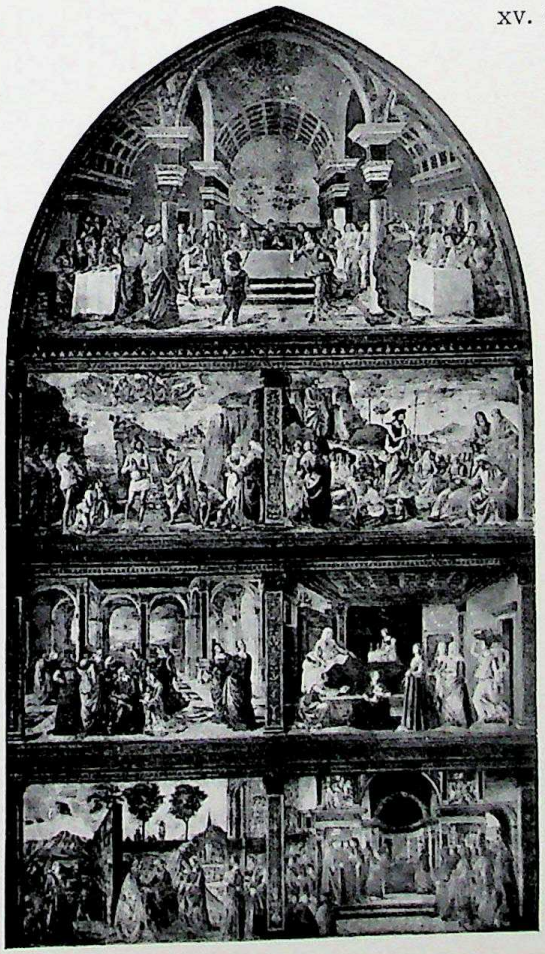
XV. DOMENICO GHIRLANDAJO. DETAIL FROM 'THE BETROTHAL OF THE VIRGIN.'
MURAL PAINTING: STA. MARIA NOVELLA, FLORENCE



XVI. DOMENICO GHIRLANDAJO. GROUP OF MURAL PAINTINGS
STA. MARIA NOVELLA, FLORENCE

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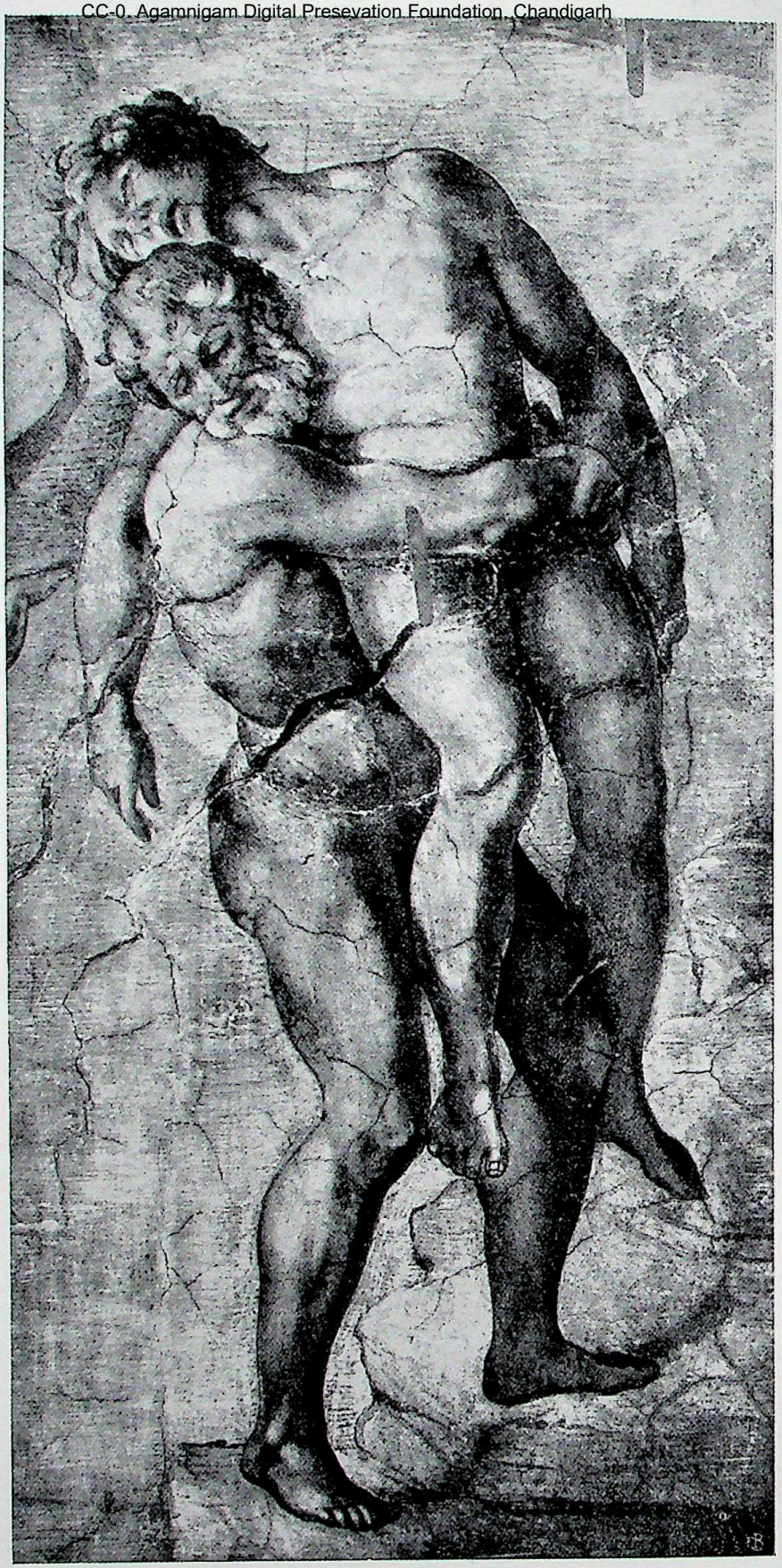

XVII. MICHELANGELO. DETAIL FROM 'THE FLOOD'
MURAL PAINTING: SISTINE CHAPEL, ROME

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XVIII. TINTORETTO. 'THE FINDING OF S. MARK'S BODY' MURAL PANEL: PINACOTECA, MILAN

XIX. PAOLO VERONESE. DETAIL FROM 'EUROPA AND THE BULL' MURAL PANEL: DUCAL PALACE, VENICE

XX. TIEPOLO. 'THE EMBARKATION OF CLEOPATRA'
MURAL PAINTING: PALASSO LABIA, VENICE

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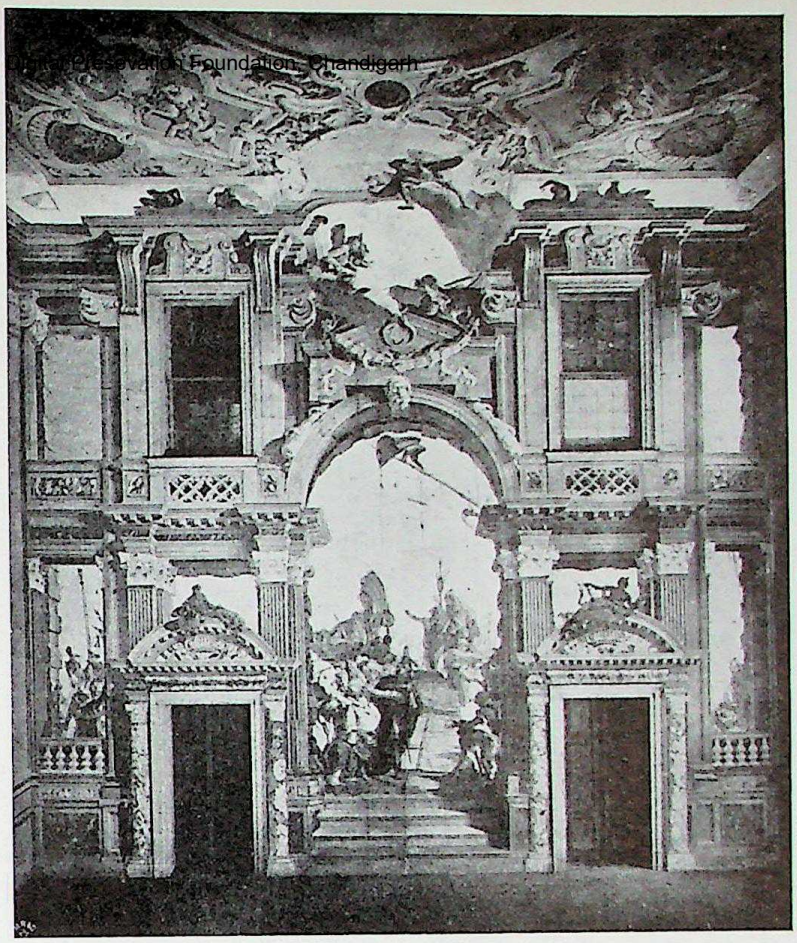

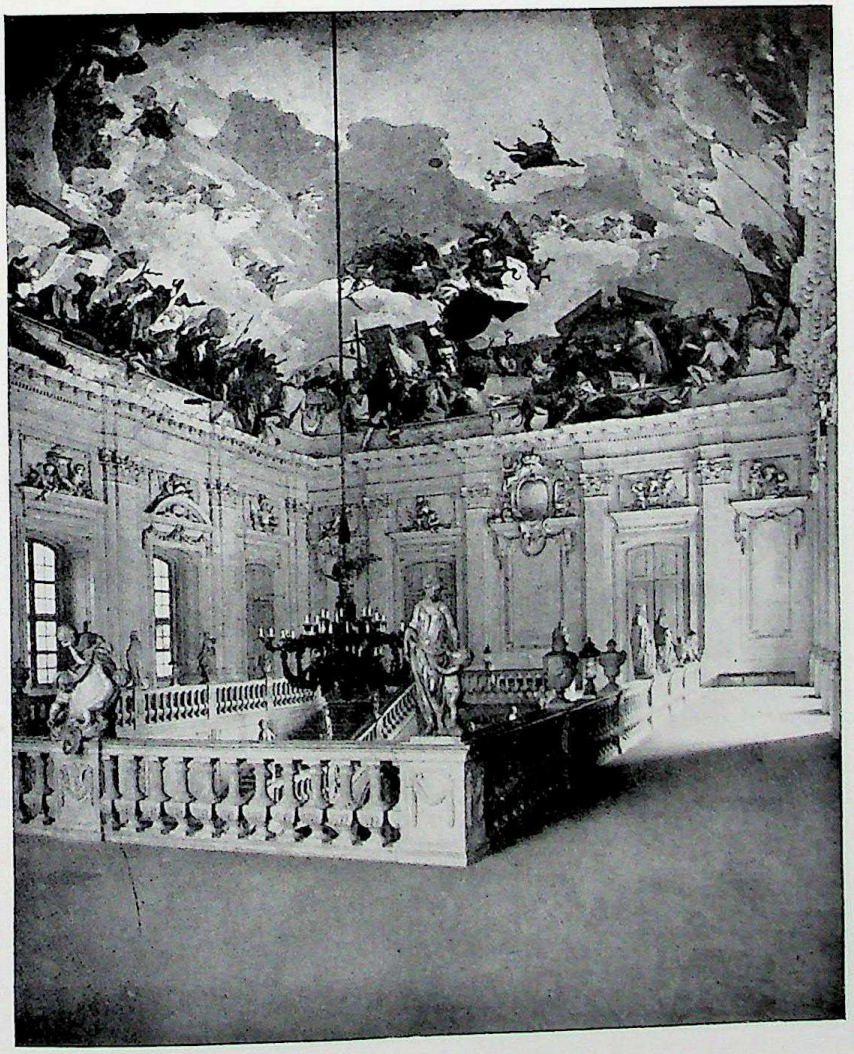

XXI. TIEPOLO. MURAL PAINTING: STAIRCASE CEILING, EPISCOPAL PALACE, WÜRZBURG

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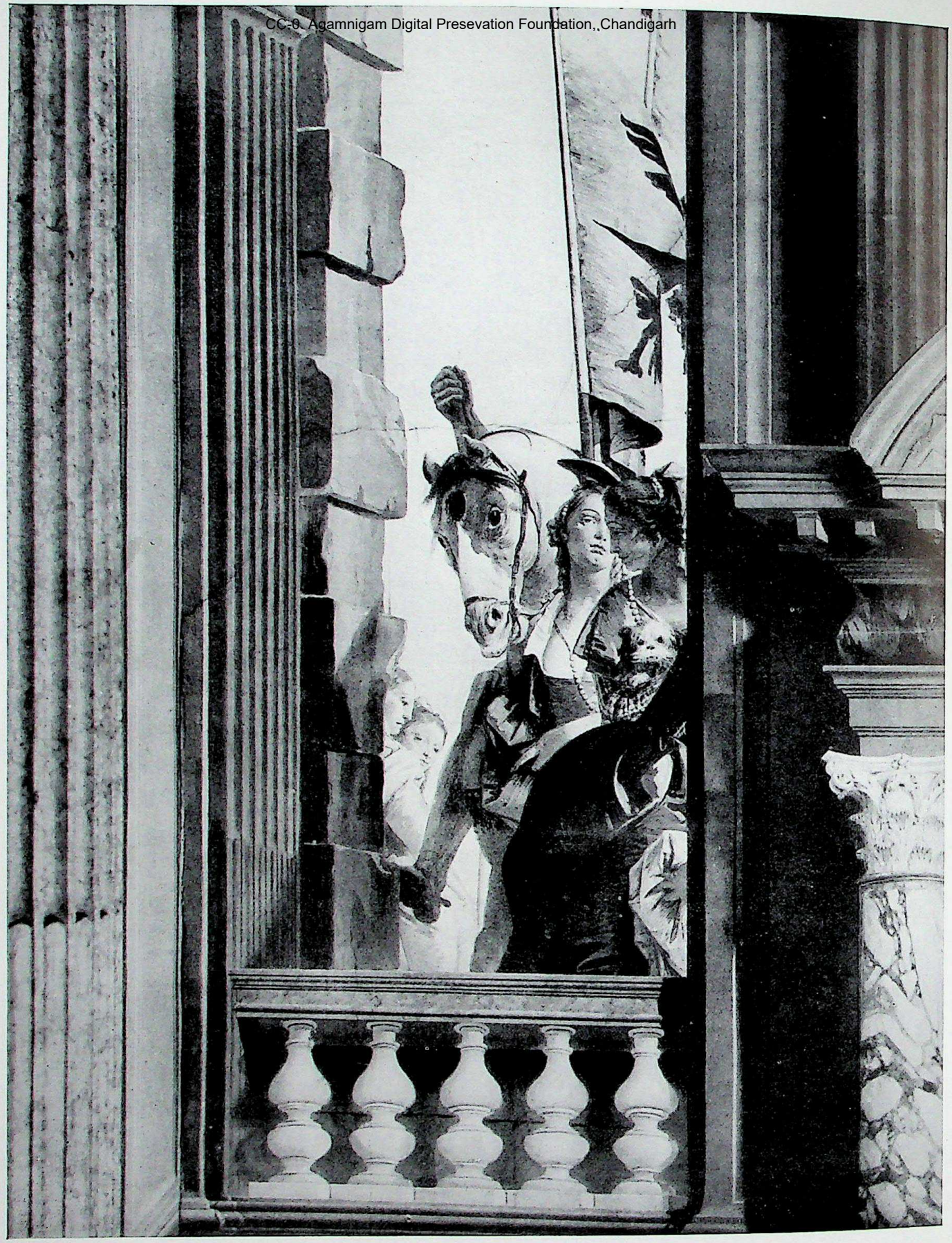

XXII. TIEPOLO: DETAIL FROM PLATE XX

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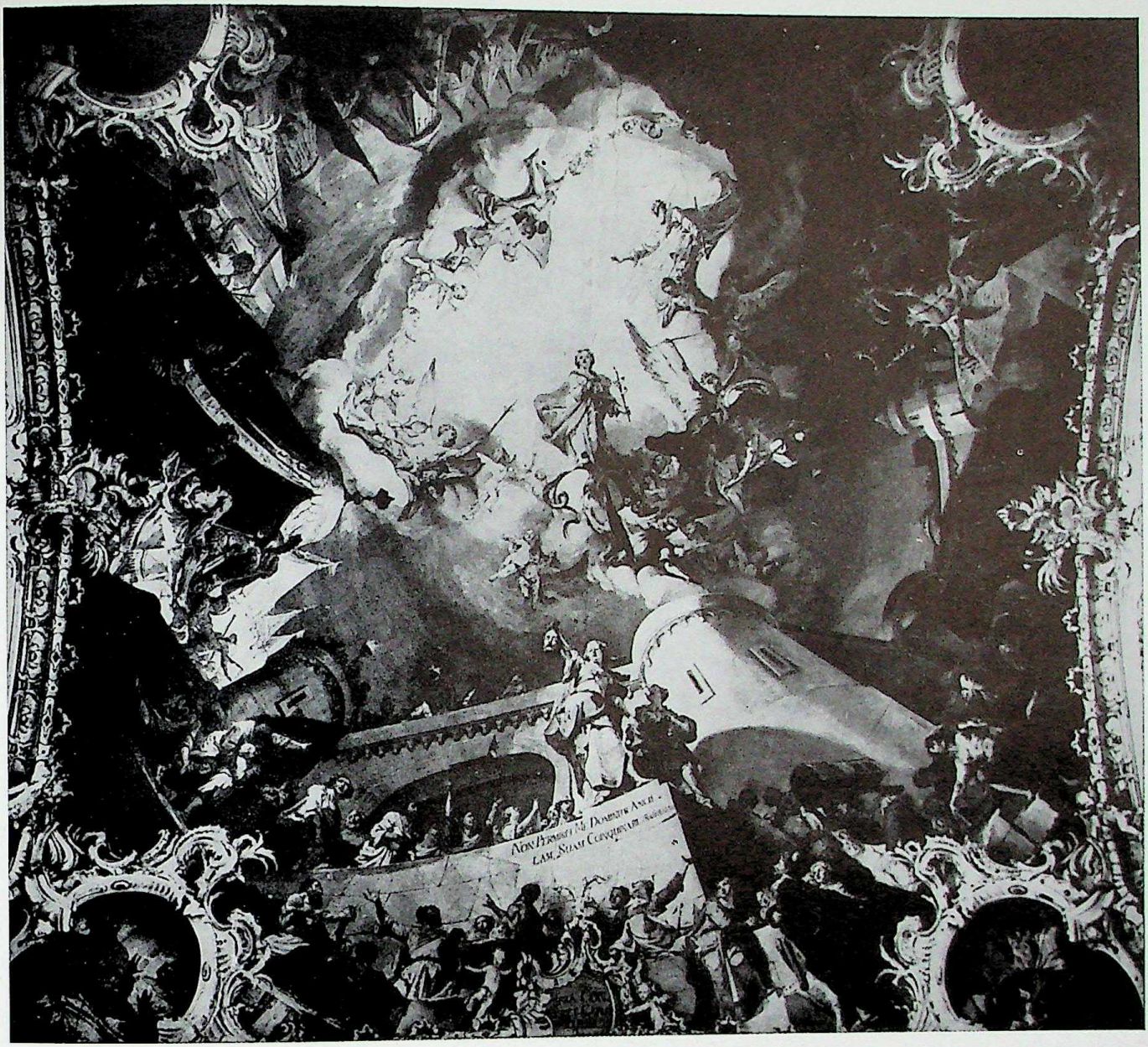

XXIII. MATHÄUS GÜNTHER. 'JUDITH'

MURAL PAINTING: CEILING, WILTEN CHURCH, TYROL

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MURAL PAINTING: PLÂS NEWYDD, ANGLESEY

XXIV. REX WHISTLER

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XXV. REX WHISTLER

MURAL PAINTING: PLÂS NEWYDD, ANGLESEY

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XXVI. HANS FEIBUSCH MURAL PAINTING: PORTMEIRION, NORTH WALES

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sance it becomes a measurable thing outside us; in the Baroque infinite again, outside but drawing us into itself. The feeling of our time is again of an infinity, but in which, if I may say so, we are here and far away at the same time. A great deal of modern man's energy seems bent on overcoming distance. The Baroque, too, has a strong movement in space, but it is the action of moving which is always stressed. In our day it has become the bridging of distance between two objects, which is done by mechanical means and often so quickly, as in telephony and telegraphy, that we are not aware of any movement. This makes us gradually change our mental picture of space; we are in both places at the same time and see them telescoped, superimposed. I do not know whether it was painting or the cinema that started showing us things as semi-transparent, one object visible through the other; certainly we have here a new convention never used by art before and, for many reasons, highly significant to us. In our painting, in our architecture, in our science, we no longer think in solid bodies and masses; they have all become somewhat diaphanous and it is the forces inside, the strains and stresses, movement and counter-movement, that are essential. In the same way, it is no longer necessary to go to the elaborate deception of opening an illusionary window in a wall in order to create space beyond. We have new means at hand more in keeping with contemporary architecture. It was again Cézanne who began to construct his pictures not with a Renaissance perspective but with planes, flat shapes lying behind each other, so that objects are shown not so much as curving away towards the back but rather flattened out sideways to their full silhouette and separated from the ones behind them by an outline or shadow. This form of space construction was used in many variations by other artists after him. Applied to our case, we must imagine the wall transformed into a great number of glass sheets, a number that may exceed the thickness of the wall, as long as they run parallel to its direction. On these sheets we imagine painted the diverse objects of our picture, some on the front panes, some on the ones behind. We can make the first objects large and the others smaller, or the first strong and the others paler, or the back ones showing through the front ones, but their silhouettes will always be facing us. By relating these objects to each other or to the background, through repetition of colour or of line, or through compositional cross reference, we can create a backward and forward movement beyond and yet inside the wall, the most intimate relationship between objects far and near, and that ambiguous

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feeling of great distance and complete nearness at the same time which is so characteristic of our period. And we shall have widened out our space without destroying the continuity of the wall. This is rather an important point; it is a very pleasant sensation for the spectator to let his eye glide into space, to rest it on a far point and to be aware at the same time of the unbroken wall surface. If I have laid particular emphasis on this new convention for suggesting space, I do not mean it to be the only one practicable for us. Just as buildings will be erected in many different ways and styles more or less characteristic of the main trend architecture takes, so mural painting will have to be done according to the various needs of the houses it is to fit. I personally believe, though, that just as the new building principles will be adopted increasingly because they are essentially of our time, so will the types of mural painting that are of the same spirit. But I think the moment has now come when I ought to say something about modern architecture.

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V

Architecture

If I have to say a few words here about contemporary building, I beg the architect's indulgence for whatever faults and inaccuracies he will find. I have had no training in architecture and many of its problems are right outside my sphere. But I have found that many painters know less than I do, and yet want to paint walls. Into the social changes, for instance, which are at the bottom of everything, I shall not go here; neither the altered working and living conditions, nor the increasing preoccupation with social amelioration as the ultimate goal of society, which has so profoundly affected every aspect of our civilization.

To characterize the changes architecture has undergone, we shall confine ourselves to the question of style and of construction. About a century ago the properties of iron as a building material were first appreciated and applied in the construction of some remarkably fine and modern-looking bridges. The use of iron then spread to the building of large market-halls, railway stations and stores. But these daring feats of engineering were not considered as architecture and were, with rare exceptions such as the Crystal Palace, hidden away anxiously behind a stone façade in one of the recognized styles. These had become something like a dress one slipped over, for convenience, and which one changed according to the fluctuations of fashion. It is a strange fact that for a long time there ran side by side the engineer's anonymous, purposeful and natural application of new materials and methods, and the architect's ambitious and vain play with worn-out formulas. Stranger still, that when at last William Morris and his circle rebelled against the blind copying of old styles, they did not grasp the situation nor the new possibilities but turned back again into a romanticized past while fulminating against iron and machine. It was unfortunate that these men who recognized the need for a new spirit in art were so wrapped in mediaeval conceptions that they could not get beyond their ideas of guilds and craftsmanship and came to a glorification of handicraft as dangerous

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as, later, that of the machine from which we still suffer. Their first impulse was excellent, but they were prevented from carrying their aim of naturalness and simplicity to a conclusion because of their love for romantic trappings. They had, however, shown the way, and their ideas were developed on the Continent.

Meanwhile the changes in building construction had made great strides; steel and concrete were introduced and in America the first principles of really modern architecture were worked out almost unconsciously. Factories, office buildings, blocks of flats were erected with steel skeletons, and it was recognized that to use for their decoration what had been the structural elements of past building methods would be ridiculous, and that it would be more truthful to let the new ones speak for themselves. So these buildings, although covered in stone or brick, show their construction quite clearly and are remarkable for the absence of ornament and for their long straight lines. Unfortunately American architecture suffered a relapse in the second half of the last century and for a long time cluttered up its buildings with a wild medley of decorations in any conceivable style.

Meanwhile the influence of William Morris's aesthetic doctrines and of American building methods began to make themselves felt on the Continent. There was, it must be said, an interlude first in which Morris's fondness for flowing lines and floral ornaments led to a most extravagant and fantastic style which originated in Belgium and was called Art Nouveau. It seems to us, now, as if all anti-functional tendencies, all the forces of romantic individualism, had gathered together for a last outburst before being smothered by relentless rationalization and mechanization. A mad passion for curves and curly-wavy forms made buildings spring up like surrealist nightmares, decorated all over in any conceivable material, with wildly flowing ornaments. Every utensil, every piece of furniture, was given some surprising and, as a rule, most unsuitable shape; but it must be said that the execution was often of the highest standard. Perhaps we have here the last great attempt of the artist-craftsman to fashion the surrounding world into a combination of pure poetry and highly individual handiwork. The whole Continent was swept by this strange style; the Latin countries were most seriously affected; England was hardly touched, except perhaps for the work of Aubrey Beardsley.

The reaction followed when the lyrical and delicate beauty of Art Nouveau

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was debased and vulgarised by mass fabrication. It became clear that in an age drawing nearer to complete industrialization, the exuberantly personal approach could not be upheld and that other standards would have to be found. There followed a period everywhere of quiet discipline and elimination of unessential detail, with great honesty and excellent applied art more or less following English lines; but further changes were necessary. It was then that the impersonal perfection of the machine, which had been recognized for some time, began to attract architects and designers. Man had come to like that at first horrifying intruder, the machine. By working it, by being in constant touch with it everywhere, he had got used to its strange shapes and come to take these particular forms as standards for his general appreciation. The machine, this formerly humble thing, built without any thought for aesthetic values, put together with the sole idea of making it work, was found to exert by its very directness, purposefulness and neatness of shape, a strong influence on our sense of beauty. Besides, those were the days when unlimited progress seemed to lie ahead and the solution of most social problems was expected with the help of the machine. Just as in the days of Henri Rousseau nature was idealized and worshipped, so it was the turn of the machine now. A whole new ideal of perfection was based on it.

The introduction of steel, reinforced concrete and glass as building materials was, of course, a main factor in this revolution of aesthetics, and stressed the need for a purely constructive outlook. The new materials permitted a hitherto unheard-of freedom and upset all manner of age-old conventions. There was, for instance, a certain relationship between strength and weight in stone building which had entered into all conceptions of stability. The idea that a carrying component of a building had to be broader at the base than at the top was so commonly accepted that all our symbols denoting strength are based upon it. Or it was taken for granted that among the main supporting parts of a building, the corners were of special importance. These, with many other notions, now no longer hold good; modern constructions often rest on the smallest supports and are hung up on slender masts somewhere within the outer shell. Mass and weight are being discarded everywhere for the sake of tension and strength. One of the most important points: as the walls are no longer the carriers of the building but only a clothing skin, giving seclusion and protection, they can be treated with greater freedom, pushed backward and forward as required by

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the purpose of the building, opened or closed, made opaque or transparent. A result of this flexibility is that outer and inner space are no longer strictly separated; that, in fact, the whole building has become one homogeneous arrangement in space.

Now many new materials which are so much more efficient than the old ones have one thing in common: they are very hard and specialized and have to be made and shaped in their own places of manufacture, away from the building site. Once they arrive there, they are finished and rigid pieces. The man who plans the building must have the knowledge and the precision of an engineer; he must be dead right in his calculations. The men who work on the site are no longer artisans whose delicate touches and improvisations are visible in innumerable details; they have become more or less skilled workmen who put the parts together and who can excel only in an impersonal exactness. So it comes that the modern building, for all its free and flowing shape, is a most precise and rigid piece of machinery which has to be worked out with mathematical accuracy. It is no wonder, therefore, if the architect becomes more and more of a planner who delights in a perfect construction and the skilful exploitation of the means at his disposal.

All these changes, which are still going on, and at increasing speed, put a very heavy strain on the architect's aesthetic sensibility. Everything was in flux, with materials, methods and forms altering fundamentally; old standards of beauty were no longer applicable either. Was it possible to find a new aesthetic code embracing the new building principles? So far architecture had moved forward mostly by elimination and reduced herself to simple forms out of a feeling of honesty and in order to cope better with structural problems. Then it was found that the other arts, painting and sculpture, were undergoing a similar revolution and meeting it by getting back to their roots. The basic elements upon which they had come, the geometrical ones, were the foundation of architecture too; a house was really a cube, a window a square. There was in all three of them the same dwindling-away of the massive body, the same tension, the same play with static qualities. So it came that cubists, particularly Picasso, and such purists and constructivists as Mondrian, Archipenko or Moholy, exercised considerable influence on the style of the new architecture. The predilection for cubes, for the sharp juxtaposition of vertical and horizontal parts, the complete asymmetry, the long bands of windows, the absence

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of cornices and window profiles, all these are elements of cubist origin. Not only the elevation, but the layout, also, of a modern building or of a group of buildings looks almost like a drawing by one of these artists, showing the same informality, the same long projections in various directions and abrupt changes. There is the same bareness and angularity, the same will to shock and startle by a deliberate makeshift appearance and hardness, that are common to all revolutionary styles. Here, then, we have quite clearly an idiom shaped not entirely by necessity but also by deliberate artistic considerations; so that we can say that modern building has grown out of new structural possibilities and limitations, plus the influence of a particular period in art.

Of this latest fact, it seems to me, many people are not quite aware, nor of the implications arising. Too often does one find architects to whom all stylistic qualities mentioned above are an inseparable part of modern architecture, whereas they are really nothing of the sort. Only recently did I see a lecturer point out triumphantly the similarity between a drawing by, I think, Moholy and a plan by Le Corbusier. But that really only means that both men belong to the same period in which fundamentals were established in the barest way, and that, while their designs have all the brilliance and incisiveness of the pioneer's work, they also have the accompanying primitiveness. This was an excellent thing as long as modern architecture had to struggle for freedom from old conventions and for mastery of the new materials and aims. But these difficulties have been conquered; the way to handle steel, reinforced concrete, glass, has been found; the layout of a building, or group of buildings, is done with the greatest informality, just as purpose and existing conditions require; the elevation can be done on the same principles and assume any shape demanded by architect or client. It seems to me that, with technical difficulties overcome, it is no longer necessary to be quite as ascetic, nor so strictly utilitarian either. As it is, I have a suspicion that what pretends to be a useful shape only is really often just a fashionable one, and that functional designing is being pushed to where it turns ridiculous. There is no more reason, for instance, for having a narrow iron spiral staircase, like that of a ship's engine-room, in an expensive private house than there was for having a chandelier in the shape of a naked young woman hung up by her tresses in the times of Art Nouveau.

Let us examine this attitude of functionalism; every real architectural style in history used the building material at hand, to the best of existing knowledge of

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constructing, for the purpose that was most important at the time. Modern building was evolved by people who believed in the improvement of social conditions and the general standard of living as an end in itself, and in the power of the machine to achieve it. Hence we find that industrial efficiency and living comfort are the main aims. One might think this a regrettably narrow outlook and perhaps even a disastrous one; but within its range it is good and healthy. But in their love for the machine, its rationality, completeness in itself and smooth perfection, the same people overshot the mark and introduced a mechanical quality everywhere, so that in painting we get creations like Baumeister's mural, a ridiculously heroic hybrid of machine and human form; in sculpture things like Epstein's 'Rock Drill,' and in architecture slogans like that of the house as a machine for living. Who has not seen buildings in which everything is thought out scientifically to guarantee maximum efficiency? But if you try to visualize the inhabitants who will run smoothly in the grooves worked out for them, you can only imagine them as a sort of robot.

Architects are more and more developing into organizers of men's existence on completely rational lines, with work and leisure, public and private life arranged in excellent fashion, but without taking any notice of individual feelings and the wish for privacy. Why is it that so many modern houses only look right when every piece of furniture, including ash-tray and vase, is in exactly the proper place? Why is it so difficult to 'break in' a modern house, to make it into the comfortable and natural background for one's life? I think it is the spirit of the machine, of the inorganic, that has encroached upon the domain of the human being. We have become so rational, such thorough planners and organizers, that our feelings and emotions have been driven underground and, being no longer permitted to take part in the conscious shaping of our world, break out in Hollywood dreams or, worse still, in mass hysteria. No country was as thoroughly organized and rationalized as Germany, and we have seen the frightful results. It always seems to me rather an amusing sidelight on the more severe modern architects that they should be so much attracted by surrealism. They refuse to acknowledge art as a legitimate partner in their work, so they have to take it from below, undigested, from the sub-conscious, and as a result one sees queer bones or pebbles arranged under glass domes in their frigid homes.

The outcome of all this functional building is that we have an excellent

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architecture for practical needs; factories, administrative buildings, hospitals; but whenever some of the spiritual aims for which we live should be expressed, the results are, to say the least, meagre. Our churches, town halls, community centres, theatres, are too often like factories or barns. The time has come for our architects to show a little more imagination and freedom; to realise that straight lines and bare walls, and a complete disregard for decoration, are not essentials of good building; that, in fact, in many countries architecture has already taken the next step and called back the painters and sculptors in order to gain more richness and spiritual significance. Continental architecture, particularly in Scandinavia, Switzerland and Italy, has shown much more initiative than this country's. Their buildings are less abstract; they frequently paraphrase certain national characteristics and use sculpture and painting with, often, the happiest results. Architects seem to conceive their work with greater richness, variety and subtlety, and to include the other arts seems to be more natural to them. The harmony achieved is often admirable, with the lines of a building culminating in a piece of sculpture, the festive and gay colour of the rooms leading up to a main part decorated by a mural.

I think even amongst architects many will agree that we have at present an unnecessary degree of rawness in building. This comes, to a certain extent, from the fact that architects assume to themselves what is the business of the other arts, and from their ignorance of what these can do. Highpoint II, a building by that eminently gifted young Russian, B. Lubetkin, is a case in point. He used there, as supports for the porch, two caryatides from the Acropolis in Athens. Now these figures, by their size and detail, were clearly meant for the original small building, where they look large and monumental. Stuck in front of a huge, smooth-surfaced block of flats, they are just silly and reveal in the man who put them there a lack of imagination. Quite clearly the figures, and the whole porch, should have been the work of a sculptor, but the architect could not bear interference with his autonomy. To design these figures, to give the porch, that big slab of concrete, the proper shape leading from the organic forms of the caryatides to the geometrical ones of the building, that certainly would have been a worthy task for a man like Henry Moore. In many new houses I have found that the architect has attempted to use colour imaginatively, to stress certain parts, to break up monotony, to brighten dark walls; but how poor is the range of colours as a rule; how little does he know about

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the properties of colour, their infinite scale, or about the combination of several tones. Here again he is obviously trying to do something outside his range. Certainly this is a job for the painter, a man who thinks and works in colour all his time.

But I am again getting off the track. I have indicated the growth of modern architecture just sufficiently to give the painter a lead; but I must not try to tell the architect his job. The main thing is that, after a long sterile period, we have again a new and vigorous architecture which is not the invention of any one person nor of a group nor even a country; it is a worldwide movement expressing the conceptions and needs of modern man honestly and without regret for the past. It may not yet have reached a remarkable degree of sublimity, but it is, after all, still very young. Its achievements, so far, are most far-reaching. If the Baroque moulded all the components of the Renaissance building into one expressive gesture, modern architecture does a much more sweeping thing. It completely dissolves the whole outer shell of the building, that heavy fortress, and, constructing from the inside and moving about unhampered, it can grow in any direction and shape. Never before have such bold, sweeping lines and curves, such easy movement and conquest of space, such airiness been seen.

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VI

Architecture and Mural Painting

GETTING back to painting, what indications for our work can we derive from this excursion into architecture?

First, we have found that modern building is a highly mechanized process and that it is likely to remain so, whatever changes it may undergo in style. We have also found that this entails a preference for hard, smooth materials and a certain neatness. This means that we require some precision in a mural painting too. I do not suggest a smooth surface or elaborate finish; a decoration may be done with very few lines and patches of colour and a very rough surface. But it must be well defined; its straight lines should be really so, its curves should swing clearly, its tonal differences should be unmistakable. Whatever means the artist uses, he should treat with a certain finality. Sketchiness, particularly of the Impressionist kind, goes badly with a modern room. Even when the painting consists of indications only, of a few forms coming through the surface of the wall, they must give the impression of being unalterable. Not that the whole thing should have a look of cast iron; the good artist will feel by instinct how much rigidity there should be and how much freedom, and how to balance the two. In fact, the stricter he is in one way, say in the architectural planning of his design, the more freedom he can permit his colour. Even a surface completely dissolved by a pointillistic technique, a brilliant, rich weave of colour, as in Seurat's 'La Grande Jatte,' is held together by the incredible firmness of the structure and gives the most perfect mural effect. It is also possible to conceive one's work in direct contrast to a smooth and polished room. But it must then be a marked and confined opposition and bear, underneath a wild and varied surface, a strict composition which guarantees unity with the surroundings.

Another thing we have noticed is the flexible arrangement in space, the absence of weight, the thinness of the walls, the tendency towards

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transparency. This explains the architect's predilection for light, flat, decorative painting. What he really wants is not so much flatness as absence of the weightiness associated by him with three-dimensional work. The loss of matter, of stodginess, of flesh, which is so notable in every aspect of our life as compared, for instance, to that of the Victorians, is most marked in architecture, and it is clear that in mural painting the heavy illusion, the completely rounded body with natural colour and deep shadows, is no longer permissible. But that does not mean that the suggestion of space has to be avoided. On the contrary, suggestions of infinite depth, dissolving the wall into endless receding planes, with a play of backward and forward moving forces, should be most appropriate, if carried out in harmony with the structure of the building. In fact, it seems to me that here, in the creation of immense space with light and semi-transparent forms, lies a possibility to unite painting and architecture again as closely as in the Baroque.

Then we have found that modern architecture is informal, likes asymmetry and does not like ornament. This influences the outer shape of the picture and its emplacement. In all old forms of mural painting we find a frame which may vary in importance but which is always there to mark the boundary between picture and wall. This frame is sometimes only a thick line; it is often a broad painted border, more or less richly ornamented, and later on becomes a wooden or plaster moulding of increasingly heavy design, always in keeping with the general ornamentation of the room. This frame is now no longer necessary; our rooms have been stripped of all ornament. And as it is our tendency to unite the painting to the wall as closely as possible, it would be unwise to separate the two artificially by a frame. It is much more advisable to fade the work out into the wall, or rather to let it grow subtly out of the background. This is easy enough when the picture is a flat one, but requires some inventiveness and tact when it reaches back into the distance. In olden times the three-dimensional work aimed seriously at an illusionary effect, and for that reason the edges of the painting had to be convincingly camouflaged. No such realism is intended by the modern painter, unless it is done in a spirit of pastiche and make-believe in the manner of Rex Whistler, where the heavy frame then becomes part of the game. It is a useful device to use the colour of the wall inside the painting, which helps to unite the two, just as in a drawing the whiteness of the paper binds everything together into one plane, in spite of the perspective.

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As to the shape of the mural, there exists in this country a strong tendency to make it a vignette, either in a conventional frame or as a more or less regular shape in the middle of a wall. This is, of course, quite feasible and always the safest solution. It is, however, not one congenial to modern architecture, as it prevents the painting from entering into close union with the wall. The round, oval or square form, placed in the middle of the wall, will always give the impression of a self-contained easel picture and look somehow detachable, and it is the same if a number of vignettes are spaced out evenly along the wall. An irregularly shaped and placed mural, on the other hand, increases the many difficulties of the painter. He has always been used to orientate the composition of his pictures towards the frame or the sides of his canvas. There he steadied himself and got his most definite accents by driving the lines of his design against it. Whether they were cut by the frame at significant points or formed their network inside it, all lines in the picture were, in one way or the other, related to it. Now there is no frame; everything peters out towards the periphery, so he has to steady it all from the inside, build up his significant line crossings and angles there. Also he has to take into account all the wall surface that remains empty. In a way he is in the same position as the architect who also has no longer his outer walls into which to fit his plan, but lets his layout grow logically from the inside and then surrounds it with an irregular outer shape. Here the painter has to take himself firmly in hand to overcome the desire to show what he can do and the temptation simply to cover the whole wall. He should remember that we are more sensitive to overfeeding than our grandfathers and like our art in comparatively small doses. Also the trend of our time goes towards simplicity. We can admire some very extravagant form, wild, even gaudily coloured, but only if it is offset by an expanse of quiet, plain background.

I think that in this point even Stanley Spencer's great art has failed in his Burghclere War Memorial. Although it is a more important work than any other modern mural, and however brilliant and moving, well composed and painted the single scenes may be, the whole chapel is overcrowded by the exuberance of his vision. And even if we grant his exceptional genius the right to overwhelm us thus, it is unfortunate that it should always be a master's most personal qualities, sprung out of his innermost nature and justified only in him, that are picked up by his followers and turned into mannerisms, such as

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Michelangelo's muscles or Rembrandt's darkness. There rages at present an epidemic of Spencerism at our art schools which takes the form of overcrowded, twisting designs and doll-like figures, which bodes no good for mural painting. I think, in spite of what I have said earlier, that young artists could derive much benefit from the study of a particular quality in Chinese and Japanese art. Not, of course, by imitating their style: nothing is more boring than Chinoiserie in an Occidental; but just as modern architecture was greatly inspired by Japanese simplicity in building and furnishing, so can we learn something from their economy, their ability to work by suggestions and to include large empty spaces in their compositions. I have found it useful on occasion, when dealing with large forms which might easily have become unwieldy, to paint the whole mural in pale, flat tones, to draw the outlines thinly and then to pick out only certain parts here and there—an arm, a head, a piece of background or drapery, and to finish these more solidly, while leaving the rest.

I should like to recommend to the student an exercise, consisting in drawing on a large sheet of paper several objects, three, five or seven, large and small, so that they dominate the surface without covering it completely and without touching each other. There should nevertheless be a relationship between them, so that none could be removed or shifted without upsetting the balance of the whole. If the student can imagine and draw his objects at various distances, so much the better. He will thus acquire the faculty of relating the painted areas of a wall to each other and to the whole expanse. This compositional unity can be achieved by many means, by the use of vertical and horizontal lines, by diagonal or parallel ones, by the repetition of certain forms, by a great number of dodges taught in schools and in many books. I shall not go into them here, because I think that whoever finds one of them by hard trying and concentration has gained more than he who has learned the whole lot at school or from books. There is nothing more deadening to an artist's feeling for colour than to work out his schemes according to some system, nor to his gift for designing than to measure out his drawing according to the Golden Mean. At any rate, I have learned more by looking at Poussin's paintings in the Louvre, just concentrated looking, than from all the clever tricks taught at the school of André Lhôte, where I worked at the same time. To strengthen one's sense of balance, to contemplate good architecture and the works of painters like Titian, Chardin, Poussin, Cézanne, Seurat, for their structural qualities and without being

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influenced by their style; to redraw one's designs again and again till everything is in exactly the right place, that is the best way to develop a natural sensitiveness for composition.

If there is danger in applying too many rules to easel painting, it is even more disastrous in an art that out of its own necessitates a certain amount of formalizing. As it is, the mural painter has to digest and make his own the special conditions of the place in which he works; light, shape of wall, position and size of doors and windows, all of which will strongly influence his composition. To burden him on top of this with elaborate rules would make it impossible for him to express himself; he would become entangled in the mere craft. Unfortunately, it happens too often that sculptors or painters, in an effort to be architectural, overdesign their work till the formal elements have swallowed what emotional experience there was originally. Eric Gill's Stations of the Cross in Westminster Cathedral are so self-consciously stylized and made into pieces of beautiful craftsmanship that they have lost both the significance of the subject and any sign of its impact on the artist.

We touch here upon a difficult point; the balance between the artist's vision, emotion, experience of the world on the one hand and the form in which he clothes them on the other. It is evident that the two should be evenly matched. In a real work of art the form must not only be absolutely adequate to the contents, it must also not outweigh them. French art, for example, has never been surpassed for the perfect clarity of its form nor for its economy. Whatever the aims of the artist were, and they certainly have varied during the last eighty years, he not only selected his means with the greatest precision, he also used just enough technique to make himself clear, so that we sometimes find very complicated or individual ideas, but always a lucid and often modest form. On the other hand, we find in American art generally very simple statements completely obliterated by an enormous and very self-conscious apparatus; virtuosity and lavish means spent on a commonplace vision. There can be no doubt that the extent, clarity and intensity of our vision has shrunk much, compared to that of former centuries, and our feelings have not the same staying power. Consequently we can carry only a far smaller amount of form. The painful impression of emptiness and hollow pretence which we often experience in front of academic paintings is familiar to us and we have learned to dislike the dead surplus of form and technique there. Of the equal

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emptiness and over-elaboration in modern decorative work and pieces of fine craftsmanship, as for instance in many contemporary wood engravings, or in the two statues in front of the Royal Institute of British Architects, or the huge mural painting in its big auditorium, we are not always conscious.

Minor artists will hide the fact that they have little to say not only under a wealth of naturalistic detail, they just as often go in for abstract or semi-abstract designing and indulge in great intricacies of pattern, stylization and finish. We all know the man who is for ever experimenting with difficult materials, techniques and theories because he needs a complicated, big apparatus to prop up his uncertain self. These cases of over-emphasized form and technique are, of course, to be found in every art and it may be asked what prompts me to point out their danger here, where I only deal with mural painting. The answer is that this kind of weak art often gives itself a decorative look and is easily accepted by architects who, as a rule, are interested in decorative qualities only. It is an unfortunate thing that it should be so; an art in which great directness and warmth are necessary to assimilate the formal elements imposed from the outside, if a really live work is to be the result, attracts just those artists of lower vision and vitality who cannot express anything, but like to indulge in technical elaboration and so-called designing and who produce the many vaguely decorative and empty murals springing up everywhere.

In other forms of art we have a definite standard of quality and know that not a pleasant surface but originality and intensity of vision, a certain depth of experience and incisive handling, are essential. We have an unbroken tradition in which, although the manner of expression may change, the same level is kept, more or less, so that we know a good piece of work even if, for personal reasons, we do not like its style. In mural painting the long gap between decline and present revival has made both architects and painters lose this standard. The architect who in former times was equally well versed in both arts, used the best painters and would not have been satisfied with less than their best, fullest work, has lost the knowledge of painting, so that now he can no longer appreciate any but the most superficial qualities. Besides, not knowing it any more, he has become afraid of it; he fears it might disturb his plans, be too weighty, too emphatic. And so he naturally prefers empty and emasculated work. The painter, too, has lost the knowledge of what the mural could be and is satisfied with a pleasant poster-like effect, which is sometimes all that is

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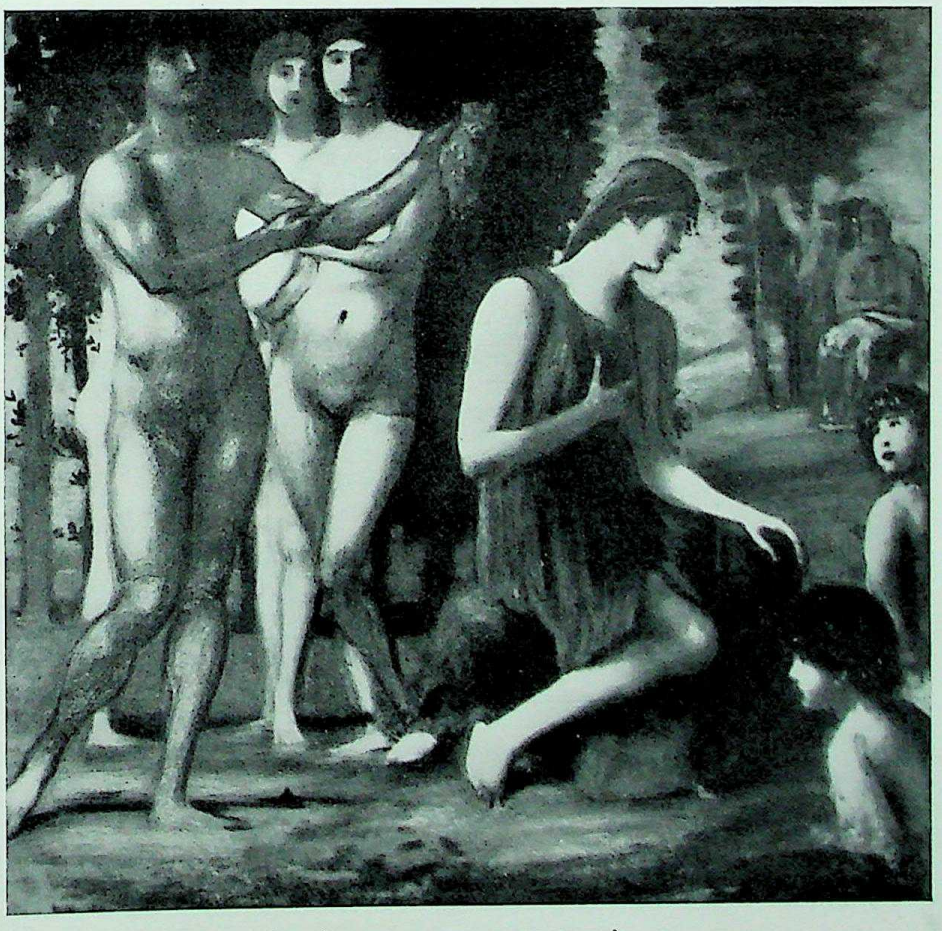
XXVII. FERDINAND HODLER. 'DEPARTURE INTO BATTLE' MURAL PANEL: THE UNIVERSITY, JENA



XXVIII. HANS VON MARÉES. 'THE PRAISE OF MODESTY'
MURAL PANEL: ALTE PINAKOTHEK, MUNICH

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XXIX. HENRI MATISSE. 'JOIE DE VIVRE' EASEL PAINTING

XXX. PABLO PICASSO. 'BATHING WOMEN.' EASEL PAINTING

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XXXI. JUAN GRIS. 'PEASANT WOMAN'
EASEL PAINTING

EASEL PAINTING

XXXII. GEORGES BRAQUE. STILL LIFE

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XXXIII. JOHN TUNNARD. 'FOCAL POINT.' MURAL PANEL

XXXIV. PABLO PICASSO. 'GUERNICA.' MURAL PANEL

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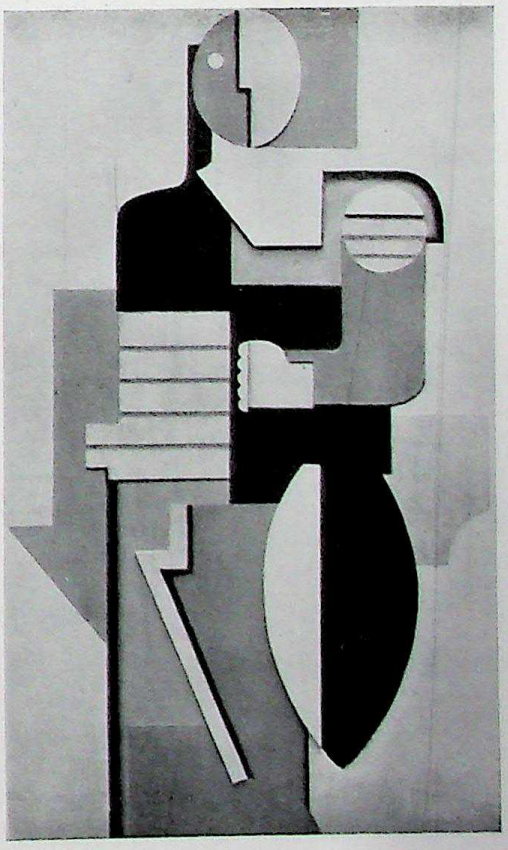
XXXV. ACHILLE FUNI.
DETAIL FROM MURAL PAINTING: TOWN HALL, FERRARA



XXXVI. WILLI BAUMEISTER. 'FIGURE'
MURAL PANEL

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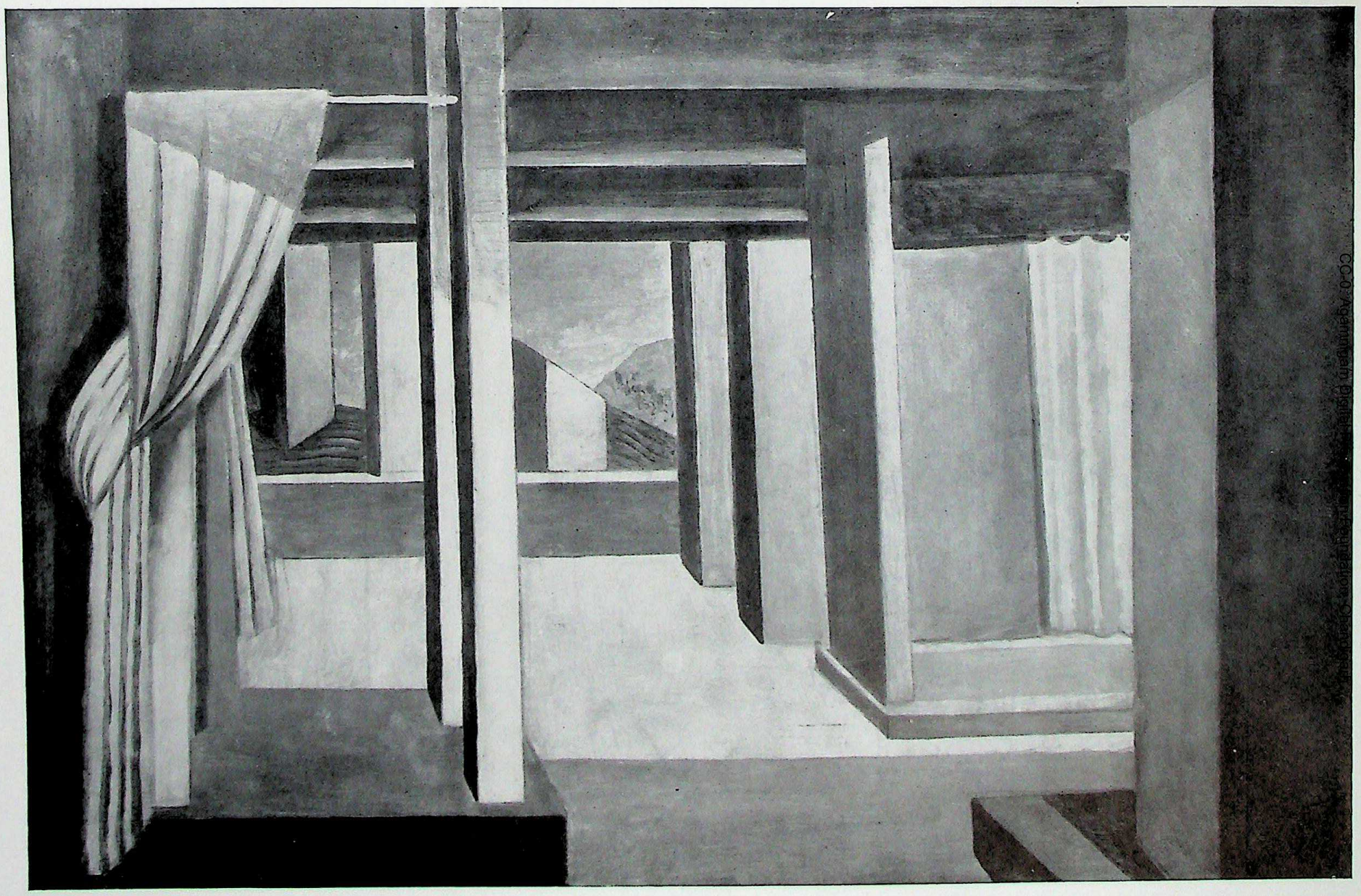
XXXVII. DIEGO RIVERA. DETAIL FROM 'STREET FAIR' MURAL PAINTING: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, MEXICO CITY



XXXVIII. BERNARD MENINSKY. 'DESIGN FOR BALLET'

EASEL PAINTING

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XXXIX. BERNARD MENINSKY. 'COMPOSITION' EASEL PAINTING

XL. HANS FEIBUSCH. DETAIL FROM 'PILGRIM'S PROGRESS'

MURAL PAINTING: ST. ELIZABETH'S, EASTBOURNE

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XLI. GINO SEVERINI. MURAL PAINTING

XLII. FERNAND LEGER. INDUSTRIAL MURAL PAINTING

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XLIII. DUNCAN GRANT. MURAL PANEL

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XLI. GINO SEVERINI. MURAL PAINTING

XLII. FERNAND LEGER. INDUSTRIAL MURAL PAINTING

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XLIII. DUNCAN GRANT. MURAL PANEL

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XLIV. CLIVE GARDINER. DETAIL FROM MURAL PAINTING — TOYNBEE HALL THEATRE, LONDON

XLV. CLIVE GARDINER. MURAL PAINTINGS — TOYNBEE HALL THEATRE, LONDON

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wanted but which more often prevents a great art from rising to its full stature. This is one of the reasons why I have included here so many reproductions of old masters. Not that they should be imitated; another Pre-Raphaelite movement, another turning-back would be fatal at a moment when our civilization is pushing forward so rapidly. I thought that their wealth of invention and, above all, their greatness, the fearful greatness of an Orcagna or Masaccio, might stir up our young painters. I know that a small photograph of a few details means little; that perhaps only the real thing in its full size, colour and surface quality, and in its surroundings, can bring the deep impact that will go on vibrating through one's life. It is this emotion, this heat of vision, that are wanted; we live in times of such picturesqueness, greatness and tragedy as any this old continent of ours has witnessed; our experience and insight have deepened under the almost apocalyptic uncertainty in which everything takes on a new, queer significance. The rough material out of which great art can be created is under our hands and, what is more important, we have been shaken up sufficiently to see its symbolical aspect. The work of our best artists, Paul Nash, Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, John Piper, Edward Bawden, has all the terrible and moving quality of our time. Surely we must be able to let some of it flow into our mural painting. We shall be spared, I hope, another outcrop of monumental banalities such as the last war brought us, and those immense, theatrical or pedestrian agglomerations of portraits or guns with which the museums of all countries were embarrassed. The war, altogether, can only be painted by those who were in the thick of it, and even they will have to let the overwhelming experience settle down for a number of years before they can begin to shape it. But whatever we choose or are given as subject, the imprint of our age must be on what we paint; the strange and furious glow has been shining on us too long not to have penetrated into every crevice of our world.

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VII

Technique

I AM now coming to the technical part of this book, where I shall go over different media used for mural painting. My list, however, lays no claim to completeness; it is, in fact, only a selection from a great number of techniques, and of those given it does not describe the many variations current. For a more exhaustive treatment of this subject, I refer the reader to F. H. Jackson's *Mural Painting* and to the Papers of the Society of Mural Decorators and Painters in Tempera, which contain the soundest and most detailed information on Fresco, Tempera and Distemper.

But first of all I should like to make a general remark which concerns not this or that technique but what seems to me a most important point for mural painting as a whole. During the last hundred years or so it has become more and more the practice to paint in the studio and to have the finished pictures fitted to the wall afterwards. Canvas is either stuck on by a process called marouflage, or stretched on a wooden frame which is set flush with the wall. Wooden or other panels are also used. This is, of course, a much more comfortable procedure for the artist; he need not work on a scaffolding, often a rickety contraption; he can work surrounded by all the paraphernalia of his studio and in more congenial surroundings. And, not the least advantage, he is not disturbed by continuous visits from loquacious patrons. Nevertheless, I most strongly advise every painter setting out to do a mural to execute it on the spot in spite of the greater difficulties. If it is the wall painting's first aim to form a complete harmony with the surrounding interior, that aim can hardly ever be achieved unless the picture is painted on the actual spot where it is to be seen afterwards. Shape, colour and light of the particular room are of the strongest influence and every quality of the picture has to be adapted to these special conditions. However well planned and executed the work is, once it is set up on the wall it will look entirely different; most pictures done in the

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studio will seem petty and overworked on their new background. Involuntarily one uses a technique more suitable for easel paintings, with smaller, temperamental brush strokes and a great amount of detail, all of which will be entirely lost. On the other hand the hard, strong character of the wall forces the artist to be bold, structural and simple; its unyielding firmness induces, quite of its own accord, a different attitude and style from that suitable for elastic canvas or hollow sounding wood. They all feel different under the brush. Besides, I have always found that to have the whole wall, not only the part to be painted on, in front of one's eyes, forces one to relate every stroke, every line or patch of colour to the entire surface. It is difficult to explain, but the fact remains that one and the same line, when drawn on a large wall instead of a small panel, will have more power, a wider sweep and dominate a larger space. Finally, there is the fact that no painting done on canvas can ever have that lovely surface texture, that delicate bloom and matt, chalky luminosity which is achieved by the amalgamation of colour pigment and plaster and which shows the true mural painting to be an organic part of the wall.

It is for this surface quality, this lightness and beauty of colour that true Fresco, the art of painting on freshly laid plaster while it is moist, has to be mentioned first among the various techniques. It can reach a transparency and glow of colour not to be equalled in any other medium; also it is, when successfully done, one of the hardiest and withstands a good deal of wear. But it must be said at once that it is by far the most difficult to use; that it requires long preparation and can only be done properly with the assistance of skilled workmen. The artist must possess a high degree of certainty, foresight and skill, which means that only after years of practice can he handle the technique with complete freedom. The tradition of fresco painting goes back very far. The inhabitants of Crete, as the excavation of the palace at Knossos shows, used it, and the strength and richness of their paintings when brought to light was remarkable. In mediaeval times it was combined with Fresco secco and Tempera; but towards the end of the 14th century it became the practice to complete the painting entirely in buon fresco. It celebrated its greatest triumphs with the Baroque painters and went out together with that great period of mural painting. After that the continuous tradition was broken and the secrets of the technique lost. There was a revival during the first half of the last century which began in Rome with artists like Cornelius and Overbeck and spread to this

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country under the influence of the Prince Consort. The results, however, were mostly very poor; partly because the technique was not properly understood, partly because it was an artistically unfortunate period, at any rate for monumental art. In our day the chemical process underlying the technique has been successfully investigated. Of outstanding modern fresco paintings I should like to recall to all those who have visited the Salzburg festivals, the beautiful decorations in the foyer of the theatre done by Faistauer, a Viennese who died much too early.

The technique of buon fresco is based on the fact that colour sinks into a moist lime and sand surface which then dries and forms a protective crystalline film over the painting. Limestone, when burnt on a wood fire, loses its carbonic acid. It is then slaked and becomes a pulp of hydrate of lime, in which state it exists in the plaster forming the surface of the wall. When colour is applied, the water used as a medium and that already contained in the plaster dissolve a portion of the hydrate of lime, and this solution makes its way through the colour to the surface, where it absorbs carbonic acid from the air. It thus becomes carbonate of lime and lies on the surface in a thin film, protecting and securing the colour. It may be washed if not rubbed too hard. Once, however, this film is destroyed, the colour lies open to any chemical or mechanical disturbing influence.

It can easily be understood that much depends on the quality of the lime. It has to be slaked with sufficient water and the process must not be hurried. The ensuing putty, which should not be watery nor contain lumps, must be left in the pit for a long time, if possible for years. When taken out for use it is mixed with water to the consistency of milk and passed through a sieve into earthenware jars. These are left standing till the water collecting has become clear; it is then poured off and used to mix the colours. The lime should be as thick and smooth as paint.

Meanwhile the wall has to be prepared. Any plaster on it must be knocked away completely and, in the case of a brick wall, the bricks have to be freshly pointed. Any saline excrescence which would in time work its way through the plaster to the surface must be cleaned off. The wall is then left to air for several weeks. Complete dryness is essential; if it is an outer wall a damp-course should be put in, and if there is any danger of dampness coming through from the outside, the inner surface may be covered with a mixture of tar and dry sand.

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Except in this last case, the wall is then thoroughly watered for several days before the plastering begins. Bricks that do not absorb the water, dark or glazed ones, must be replaced. On this watering to capacity the success of the work may depend, as on an insufficiently moist wall the plaster dries too fast and absorbs the water with which the colour is mixed instead of forcing it to the surface. If bricks are very smooth, they should be roughened to offer a better grip to the plaster. Stone walls do not need quite as much watering. In this country where the air contains so much moisture and temperatures change so often and abruptly, it is a good thing to make the painting independent of a wall that is too easily affected by damp, and to create a constant flow of air around the picture. The wall is given a coat of tar or Portland cement; two inches away from it a framework of battens and laths is erected and the plastering done on these. Ventilation holes at the top and bottom ensure the same temperature and dryness of air in front and behind.

The plastering is done in three or four layers. The first one is mixed of one part lime to three parts very coarse sand, which should be even-grained, sharp-cornered and well washed. For this layer brick, ground to the size of peas, may be used instead of sand. Either brick or sand must be absolutely dry before mixing with the lime. This coat should be laid on 1 inch to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. As soon as it has dried sufficiently, which should be after about twenty minutes, the second layer is put on. This is mixed of lime and sand in the same proportion as the first, but with slightly finer sand; it should have the texture of brown sugar and be $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick. The third coat, of finer texture, one part lime to two parts sand, is laid on after the same interval and in the same thickness as the preceding one. The fourth, of lime and marble dust in equal proportions and about $\frac{1}{5}$ inch thick, is laid on as the work proceeds. In consistency it should be so thin as not to stick to the trowel. The wall and each successive layer of plaster must be swept with a broom and thoroughly wetted with lime water before the next coat is laid on. If for some reason any of the layers of plaster should have become dry, its surface must be pumice-stoned in order to remove the film of carbonate of lime which would otherwise keep the two layers of plaster from growing together. Water is then to be applied freely. The first three coats must have a rough surface to provide a grip for the next ones; the top layer can be as rough or smooth as the artist requires. It should, however, not be too smooth, as the colour might adhere badly. Plaster is not to be mixed more than one or

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two days ahead. If the last coat is laid while the underlying ones are still damp, it will dry much more slowly and so give the painter more time to work.

The colour scale for fresco is rather restricted; all colours containing animal or vegetable matter are excluded.

As White, only the pure lime from the pit, as old as possible, should be used. Flake White turns brown in lime. Zinc White may be used mixed with lime. All sorts of whites are mentioned by various writers: egg-shell, chalk, plaster of Paris or clay are recommended, but all would have to be mixed with lime to give them the necessary adhesive power, and some of them interfere with the drying process.

Of Yellows, all ochres can be used; so can raw sienna. The cadmium yellows have to be treated by shaking some pigment, slaked lime and water together and leaving it to stand for a few days. Of chrome yellows, only orange is safe. Naples Yellow can be used.

Among Reds all burnt ochres, burnt sienna, all oxides of iron and cadmium red are safe.

As Browns, raw and burnt umber and burnt serre verte are to be recommended.

Of Blacks, ivory black and burnt Cologne earth may be used.

Safe Purples are burnt vitriol and cobalt violet.

Blues are cobalt and ultramarine, although the second occasionally fades to near white.

Greens are terre verte, cobalt green, chrome green and viridian.

The colours are mixed with lime water, which must be clear; it is obtained by stirring lime and water together and leaving it to settle. It should be taken fresh every day and used also to rinse the brushes during the work. Some artists, however, mix their colours with pure water only.

It is, of course, a matter of the greatest importance that, for work that needs so much technical preparation and has to be done so quickly, the painter should have his design ready to the last detail. He must have a cartoon the size of the original and a colour sketch done in tempera or poster colour. As any alterations would take up too much of the precious time, it is necessary for the painter to work out his design and go over it so often that he finally carries it completely in his head. He can then work with freedom and need not constantly glance at his studies.

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The top layer of plaster is laid in the morning, but only an area which the artist will be able to finish in one day. While it is still soft enough to give under the finger, one begins with the tracing. The cartoon, or part of it, if it is too large, is placed on the wall and the outlines are traced with the end of a brush, so that they appear on the wall as narrow ridges. These will catch light and shade and add life to the work. One begins to paint then, by laying on large surfaces in medium light tints. These should not be mixed on the palette during the work, as they might become streaky and uneven, but prepared beforehand in pots, to be mixed with lime water as the occasion arises. After painting the first layer one should wait a little for the colour to be absorbed and then proceed to the next stage of painting the larger light and shadow parts. After another pause the delicate work of modelling, drawing the last details, of heightening or pulling together is done. As soon as the brush begins to stick to the surface the work has to be stopped, because then colour and plaster will not bind any longer and further touches will show as chalky or dark marks. To go on working means the destruction of all colour or tonal harmony. If any corrections or additions have to be made, they must wait till the work is quite dry. When the day's work is done, the unfinished or superfluous parts are cut away with the palette knife, giving the edge an outward and downward slant. This cutting-away may be done the next morning before the new day's layer of plaster is joined on to the old. The edge of the old one thus remains moist; it is, besides, to be wetted well with lime water.

There is a widespread opinion in this country that fresco should be treated like water-colour and that one should work in transparent tones from light to dark; starting with large areas of light tints, then deepening and strengthening form and colour while leaving the lightest parts out, and finishing with the darkest tones and shadows. It is, however, by no means necessary to follow this approach; fresco can be painted almost like oil, that is to say, in opaque tones, and that is how it was used by the Baroque artists who worked with colour of a creamy thickness and used pure lime for the highlights. One can also start by painting the large areas of shadow in one colour, then cover the whole, light and shadow parts, in a different one, and end by touching in highlights and deepest shadows. This gives a more interesting play of varied colours, cold against warm. Altogether one can, according to one's predilections, superimpose contrasting colours, such as an ultramarine blue over a dark-russet

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ground, and thus gain greater richness and sonority.

As the colours dry, a process which takes a long time, they grow considerably lighter; some to such an extent that they should always be underlaid with other dark ones. The more lime a colour contains the lighter it will dry; highlights should therefore be painted thick with lime but not lighter than the surrounding tones. Any alterations or additions to the picture must wait for at least three weeks; when everything is perfectly dry they may be done, but not in fresco. Tempera or caseine are to be used and this work is to be executed most carefully, in light strokes, as these colours look heavier than the fresco.

I have now given an intimation of the difficulty of true fresco painting and the time and preparations necessary. To a man, however, who is absolute master of the technique, experienced with different kinds of wall surfaces and plaster mixtures, besides being a painter certain of his effect, it may be possible to shorten or vary the complicated process. Proof of this is a mural done by Hans Tisdall on the lower floor of the Majorca Restaurant in London, which represents a simplified form of fresco and has now stood up to ten years' wear, including smoking by the guests and bombing by the Nazis. The painting, as can be seen on the reproduction, is raised a little above the surrounding surface. This raised shape was built up in Keene's cement on the brick wall. On it the plasterer laid a thin coat of an ordinary commercial plaster, and on this, while it was moist, Tisdall painted, using pure water only as a medium. Every evening the unfinished parts were cut away. The painting shows no blemishes and has retained all its original luminosity and gay colour.

A quicker and simpler process than fresco buono is fresco secco which is done on dry plaster. The treatment of the wall and the laying of the various coats of plaster is the same, except that two layers are sufficient. Sometimes the painting is begun on the moist top layer and only finished when this is dry; sometimes the whole painting is done on the dry surface. This has to be rubbed down first with the wire-brush in order to remove the crystalline film; then it is well moistened with lime water the evening before and the morning on which the work begins. Some painters whitewash the wall with lime before starting. The colour is mixed with a little lime or lime and caseine. In the first case lime water is used for painting; in the second five parts of soft cheese are ground till all lumps have disappeared; then one part of slaked lime is stirred into it until the whole mass suddenly liquefies. This is a very strongly binding

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material; when using it one has to add four parts of water to one of the mixture.

The colours dry more quickly and do not change as much as in fresco buono. Alterations can therefore be done earlier and in the same material as that used for the actual painting.

Tempera, a medium of great beauty and very suitable for mural decoration, is an emulsion, a close mixture of oily and watery parts such as exists in milk or egg, and it is the second that is used in most kinds of tempera. The most frequent variety is egg and varnish tempera. Taking an egg as one part, this is shaken up in a bottle with $\frac{1}{2}$ part of mastic or copal varnish, $\frac{1}{2}$ part of linseed oil and 1 part of water. As the mixture keeps fresh much longer without the water, this should be added only before use. The emulsion loses its adhesive power when the egg goes bad; not too much, therefore, should be prepared at a time. It is to be kept in a well-closed bottle and in a cool place. Before starting to paint, such colours as will be used throughout the picture should be made up with a little water and kept in jars. When needed, they are mixed with the emulsion with the palette knife. For pure yoke-of-egg tempera, only the yolks are to be used; they must be separated from the skin surrounding them. Pale yolks are preferable to darker ones. Colour pigment and yolk of egg are mixed in equal quantities and ground together with a glass muller on a slab of ground glass. To test whether the mixture has the right consistency, one dabs a little on the palette and lets it dry. When part of it is then moistened, it should show the same colour as the dry part. If it is darker, more yolk of egg has to be added. To find out whether the mixture does not contain too much egg, one scrapes it off the palette with a knife. If it comes away as a greasy, sticky substance, the mixture is right. If it scrapes off in dry flakes, it has too much egg. In order to keep the egg fresh a little longer, a drop of vinegar may be added; one can also wrap a rag soaked in vinegar around the jar containing the mixture.

As for the preparation of the wall, this is done by the application of coats of size and whitening; the proportion of the components to be changed according to the painter's preference for a more or less absorbent surface. Some artists add a small amount of coach varnish or linseed oil varnish to the mixture. To obtain a pleasant surface texture, the first coat should be stippled and the next two laid smoothly over it. Egg tempera has a very luminous and delicate character; dark tones tend to have a slight bloom over them, but this is rather an advantage in mural painting where heavy colours might break the continuity

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of the wall. Edward Wadsworth's two murals, shown here, are most accomplished specimens of Tempera painting and display the lightness and precision of tone and form typical of the medium and eminently suitable for the wall.

Distemper is a medium in which size forms the binding element, parchment size being one of the most suitable. Particularly fresh and light tones and a most beautiful powdery quality can be obtained, but the surface remains very vulnerable, cannot be washed nor rubbed hard, so that distemper should only be used in clean and well-protected surroundings and in circumstances requiring not more than a few years' life. Distemper can be used on any absorbent surface, preferably gesso or plaster. Some artists do not think it necessary to size the wall, but a coat of whitening and size is an excellent ground to work on. The colour is worked up into a stiff paste with water and size is then added; the mixture should drip off the brush like syrup. When dry the colour must not come off in flakes nor look shiny or patchy, both of which may happen if too much size is added. The painting can be done in layers, each of which has to be dry before the next one can be applied, but not more than three are advisable as the colour easily cracks and peels otherwise. When drying, the colour turns very much lighter, so that a good deal of practice is necessary to match an already dry tone. To dab a spot of colour on a slab of plaster of Paris helps, because it dries there immediately.

The various techniques mentioned so far have one great advantage in common: the colour sinks into the surface of the wall and becomes part of it. Oil colour which is used for mural painting in various forms never achieves this unity; it remains foreign to the wall however it is mixed and disguised. There are occasions when its use cannot be avoided, as for instance when the artist is called in to decorate an oil-painted room. I have often found myself in such cases and always tried to overcome the heaviness and darkness of the medium by confining myself to a few very thinly applied flat colours, with dark or light outlines, using the tone of the wall as part of my design. These paintings were all done in living-rooms, well heated and protected from damp, and have withstood the test of time very well. In larger places, however, public buildings or churches, where heating is as a rule insufficient and sporadic, where people congregate, moisture easily condenses on the wall into which it cannot be absorbed and runs down in streaks, making the paint go mouldy.

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Oil colour also grows darker and yellow with the years and assumes a dusty look as the oil is gradually absorbed into the wall. There are other reasons which, in my opinion, tip the scales heavily against oil painting on walls. One of the main beauties of mural work lies in the pale, matt surface quality which gives the impression that it has grown out of the wall. Oil colour has a depth and sonority which make it look heavy and dark; its glossiness and warmth are too rich for the chalky character of the wall. The painter is easily seduced by the power and smoothness of the material into giving his forms more plastic quality and sharpness than the wall can stand. The picture done in one of the other techniques will always look less realistic and therefore not enter into competition with people and objects present in the room.

There are several ways to make oil colour lose its brilliance, but as they all drain it more or less of its oil content, they diminish the adhesive power. One way is to squeeze the paint out of the tube on to blotting-paper, wait till a portion of the oil has been drained off and replace it with paraffin wax dissolved in turpentine. The paint is then put back into tubes. It is, of course, much easier to work in this medium than in any of the foregoing; there is no time limit, the artist can paint at his leisure and make alterations when he is dis-satisfied. But he pays a heavy price; his work will seldom have the spontaneity and delicate colour of other materials.

So far I have written only of techniques that have long been in use, that have been tested over and over again and about which there exists a great amount of literature easily accessible to art students. But we live in experimental days and there are some new methods, the products of modern chemistry, which so far we can only judge from the immediate results they give, not for their lasting qualities, but which nevertheless are worth trying. As these new colours contain ingredients which are proprietary secrets, some artists may decline to use them, but then most of the raw material we buy is processed somehow or other nowadays, so that we are never quite sure of getting exactly what we want. And, quite frankly, it seems to me that we are too much concerned about the longevity of our work. Very often it is not the best artists who trouble most to preserve their work for eternity, but rather mediocre painters who fuss over their preparations so long that they have spent most of their energy by the time they begin to paint. The pace of our age has changed so much; within living memory our building methods have altered beyond words. Houses erected

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to-day are obsolete in thirty years. Factories, office buildings, places of entertainment, none of them are meant to grow very old. Churches are probably the only ones to live longer. I think that under these conditions we should not be so much concerned to make our work everlasting that we exclude any experiments in a new technique. A mural should certainly not be done carelessly, without knowledge of the technique chosen or without practice; these are necessary simply to paint well, to express oneself freely. But there are not very many contemporary pictures so good that one would wish them to go down to posterity as worthy contributions of our age. Let us be honest: what use is the old masters' technique to us who no longer have their vision? For many reasons the modern artist has lost the staying power of former ages; he tires more quickly and loses interest; his feelings exhaust themselves more rapidly, so that if he has to spend a great deal of time, ingenuity and strength on preparations and a difficult procedure, his work is apt to grow cold and empty. That is why one must welcome new and simplified methods which permit the artist to paint unhampered by the cumbersome procedure of the old materials. I shall mention here only two of these more recent inventions. One is a gum emulsion, called Stic B Paint, and to be bought under that name, which I have been using frequently for more than ten years. This preparation, which contains resin and a small amount of oil, is designed especially for covering cement but can be used on practically any surface provided it is thoroughly dry; the wall is to be coated first with a special priming. The colour, when dry, has a matt surface, the light bloom of tempera and great fire. It can be used in thin, semi-transparent washes or as a completely opaque paint; I have never seen it crack or flake. It grows very hard after a few days and is then impossible to detach from the ground. The very large paintings I did in this medium in a Brighton church five years ago, on concrete walls, have not altered at all nor grown dirty; the colour is as fresh as on the day I put the brush down and has neither darkened nor faded. The second modern preparation is called Walpamur; it is a kind of distemper but more solid and washable. The colours are paler than those of Stic B and have all the pastel beauty of real distemper. Here, too, the wall has to be prepared with a special priming. I give both these mixtures as examples of modern invention; there must be many more. Their greatest advantage lies in the fact that preparation for the work is cut down very much; the whole process much simplified and the artist left free to pursue his aim with more

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concentration on the actual drawing and painting.

There is another kind of mural decoration I should like to mention, although it cannot be called real painting. I have often seen it used on the continent but never in this country, at any rate not by modern artists. It is called Sgrafitto. The wall is covered with several coats of plaster exactly as for fresco buono, the last one in a mixture of lime and sand or marble dust, and to this is added some pigment to give it a rich, full colour. Over this are laid two coats of limewash. A design is traced on the wall now and cut out of the thin top layer, either in outlines or in compact areas, or a combination of both. This form of decoration is very much part of the wall; it does not lend itself to a naturalistic kind of drawing but has a strong abstract quality which makes it more suitable for modern buildings. I have seen it used in churches; figures of saints about eight feet high and of a strong hieratic character, drawn in simple outlines, were very impressive.

The combination of painting and sculpture has been tried out only tentatively in our time. Some artists, to whom the backward and forward movement of the picture is of great interest, have made it not only recede into the wall but also come out of it towards the spectator; to do this they divided it into several parts on different planes, some of which lie deeper than the wall surface, while others are built up in cement on it. By this means a very close interrelation between wall and painting is established; the picture seems to grow out of the background which has split itself into different layers. Very interesting experiments on this subject were done at the Bauhaus in Weimar, particularly by W. Baumeister, a German artist. There is no reason why the combination of the two arts should not go further still, as it did in the Baroque, with sculpture and painting united. The greatest tact would have to be exercised, though, to avoid any realistic effects which might lead straight to the waxworks. The French painter Amédée Ozenfant has achieved some measure of success in letting figures, more or less roundly modelled in plaster, rise out of a painted background.

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VIII

Procedure

How does one proceed when painting a mural? In answering this question I shall draw mainly on my own experience and be forgiven, I hope, by artists who, because of a different artistic creed and temperament, follow different lines. We all have our predilections, and although we may be able to appreciate other aims and ways of approach, the one we really understand is our own.

But first a general rule which I should like to impress firmly on students, teachers and architects; that is the necessity of seeing the room which one is to decorate. You cannot design a mural without having set eyes on the surroundings into which it is to fit, just as an architect cannot design a building before he knows the site. I have seen competitions for murals at art schools in which, besides the subject, only the size of the wall was given, but no indication of the shape of the room. The outcome is that the students just design ordinary pictures, only a little duller than their other work. The inspiration they usually draw from reality, or their imagination is hampered by the feeling that some monumental or decorative quality should be brought out; but this has to be stimulated by the particular conditions of the room. The art student should not be made to design complicated and many-figured compositions in the void. Not even the plan of a room drawn by an architect with all the elevations is sufficient: it must be the real thing. The student must have a real room to decorate, and if the walls cannot actually be painted on, cartoons should be done in colour and pinned up to see their effect. The relationship between the paintings and the doors and windows is to be watched; to let part of a design or, worse, part of a figure be cut off by a door-frame is a thing that should not happen. The student should be given a small task first; a design of few and simple forms, but these are to be related firmly to the shape of the wall. To be able to draw and paint three bottles on a table-cloth so that they form part of and dominate their background is worth more than all the over-designed

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compositions of Hop Pickers in Kent or Frolicking Victorians. Another point is that the students should be trained, from the beginning, to handle the material for mural painting. A wall should be put at their disposal, or a room, or an old barn, where they can lay on plaster and paint it while it is wet, or experiment in any other technique they choose, and so learn to think in terms of their material. To have messed about in paint, to have developed a personal relationship to it, to know exactly what one can get out of it, is as necessary as to design well.

To get back to the beginning: I always start by spending a fairly long time in the room I am to decorate, to get the feeling of it; taking in the proportions, structure, light, till I can visualize it in its three dimensions. Then I draw up, or rather I ask Frankland Dark, the architect with whom I often work, to draw up a plan of it. Some artists even construct scale models; in the case of a very complicated structure this may be useful. I have never yet done it. Next comes the question of the subject, which is not to be treated lightly. The artist must have a personal feeling for it; his imagination must be fired. If it does not appeal to him so that he has to fall back on the elements of skill, design and colour as ends instead of means to get his satisfaction, there will result a discrepancy between form and contents; rhythm and shape will seem forced on the subject and the whole thing assume that look of vague decorativeness which is the bane of mural painting. The artist must therefore struggle to the utmost to be given a subject that suits him and the freedom to treat it in his own way. The architect, on his side, should make quite sure that he has picked the right painter for his particular job. A great deal of unsatisfactory work could be avoided if architects had a wider knowledge of different types of artists. It happens too often that a man is chosen simply because he is good in his line and then offered work for which he is not suited.

The next thing to do is to determine which parts of the walls the painting is to cover. This depends not only on the structure of the room but also on the use for which it is destined, and it is a question that should be settled in collaboration with the architect. Then, when I know the subject, the room and the areas I am to paint, I retire to my studio and start doing innumerable little drawings and colour notes. One of the first things to decide on is the space convention; is it to be a three-dimensional or a flat picture; am I going to break up the wall or run my painting along it? If I have an end wall, for instance, set

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between two long ones, so that one can only look straight at it, I can permit myself a proper stage-like perspective, continuing the movement from the spectator to the end wall right through it into the distance. If, on the other hand, I am to paint a frieze on a very long wall with not much depth behind me, I shall keep the painting as flat as possible so as not to irritate the spectator by shifting vanishing points. As I sketch and try out various possibilities, I keep all the data as closely together in my mind as possible and always visualize the whole room with doors, windows and other features as related to my picture. It is a twofold process, with the subject growing out of itself and reaching out over the surface of the wall, and the room closing in and penetrating the picture. Everything depends on uniting these two movements to form a proper harmony. The outcome of these labours, or this play, is a small sketch, usually in poster colour, which is submitted to the architect. And this is where often a tragedy begins, because neither the architect nor the client can read sketches nor imagine what the finished work will look like. So the painter may be forced to do an elaborate design at a stage where he should not yet pin himself down to details. It seems to me that once the painter has been chosen carefully and the layout of his design approved, he ought to be given sufficient latitude to develop his scheme slowly on the wall. I shall never forget one particular job, done many years ago, when architect and house owner interfered with my design, first because they did not understand it, and then with my painting because they were horrified to see large patches of colour appear on the wall where they had expected small details immediately.

If, however, the sketch has been approved, I start on the detail drawings. I know from long experience that one cannot just enlarge a small sketch to six or twelve times its size. All the things that make a sketch, the boldness and crispness of the outline, the suggestive quality of a quickly brushed-in tone, the many fortuitous accidents of improvisation, all these will disappear in the enlargement. The mural painter must use his sketch as the skeleton only for his work. It depends, of course, on the painter's tendencies, whether he relies on nature or on his imagination for the forms he uses, but he must furnish himself with a great wealth of them before he begins to paint. The outline of a figure may be quite satisfactory on a small drawing; the same line enlarged will look empty unless it is backed by great knowledge of form and detail. It is true that simplification of every shape is an important factor, but that does not mean

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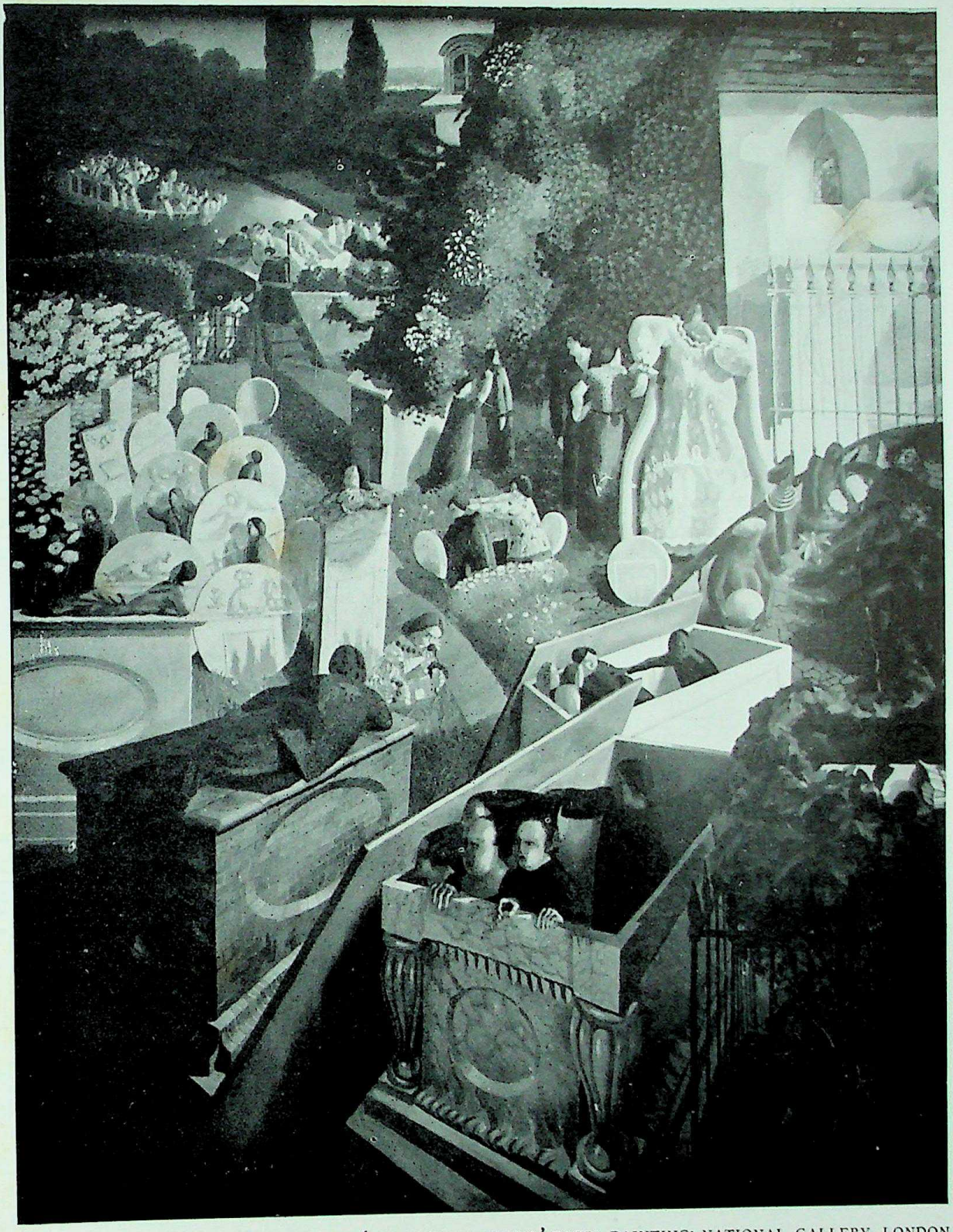

XLVI. STANLEY SPENCER. DETAIL FROM 'THE RESURRECTION.' EASEL PAINTING: NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON

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XLVII. NICHOLAS STÖCKLIN. MURAL PAINTING. BOARD ROOM OF A SWISS CHEMICAL FACTORY

XLVIII. EDWARD BAWDEN. MURAL PAINTING. INTERNATIONAL BUILDING CLUB, LONDON

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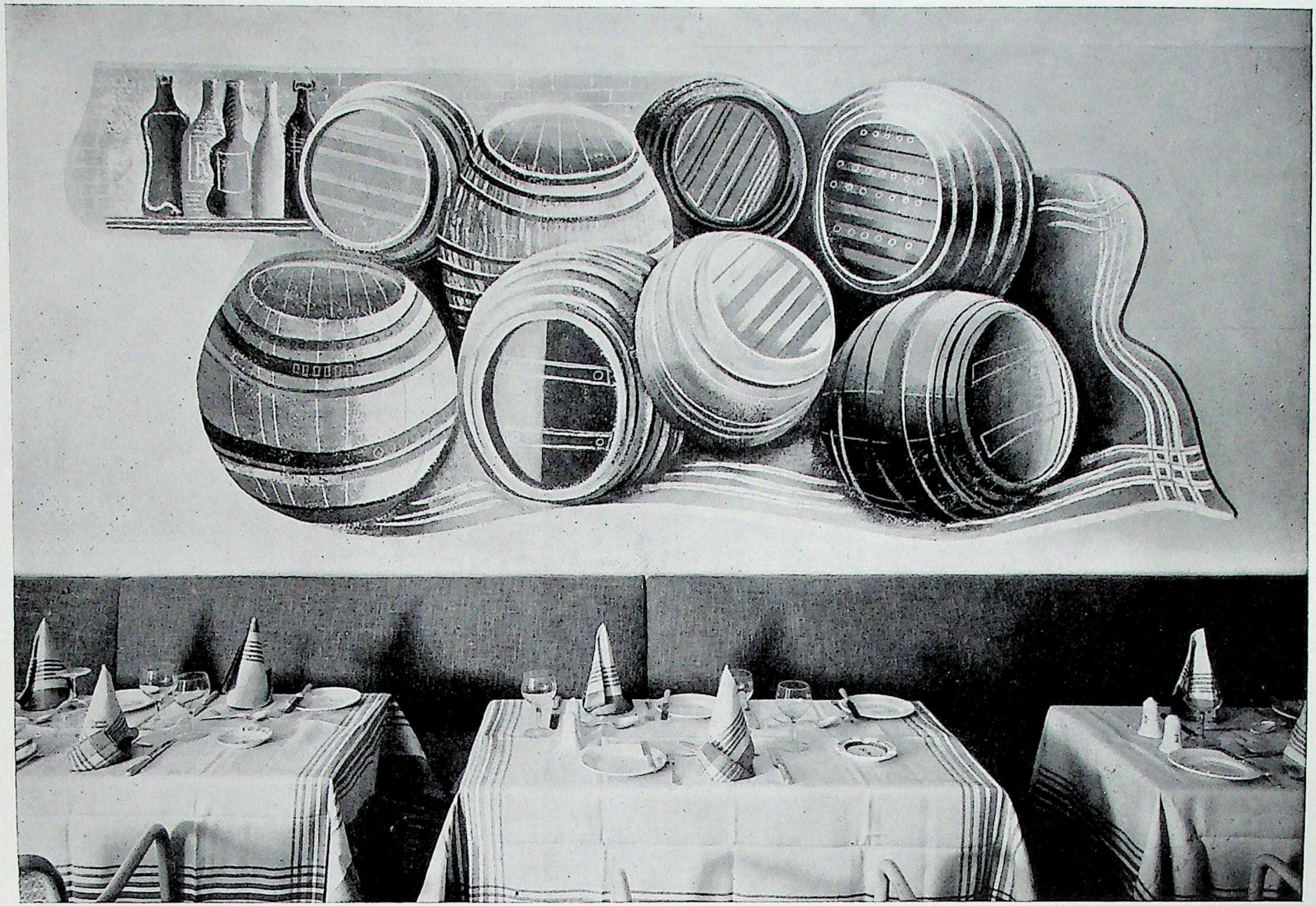
XLIX. KENNETH ROWNTREE. MURAL PAINTING

BRITISH RESTAURANT, ACTON

L. KENNETH ROWNTREE. MURAL PAINTING

CITY OF LONDON ELECTRIC LIGHTING CO.



LI. HANS TISDALL. MURAL PAINTING

MAJORCA RESTAURANT, LONDON

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LII. HANS TISDALL. MURAL PANEL THE SPINNEY, HORAM, SUSSEX

LIII. JOHN ARMSTRONG. MURAL PAINTING SHELL-MEX HOUSE, LONDON

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LIV. EDWARD WADSWORTH. MURAL PAINTING: DE LA WARR PAVILION, BEXHILL-ON-SEA

LV. AMÉDÉE OZENFANT. 'BATHERS.' MURAL PANEL

LVI. R. BOSSARD. MURAL PAINTING. GIRLS' SCHOOL, LAUSANNE

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LVII. GINO SEVERINI. 'ANNUNCIATION.' MURAL PAINTING

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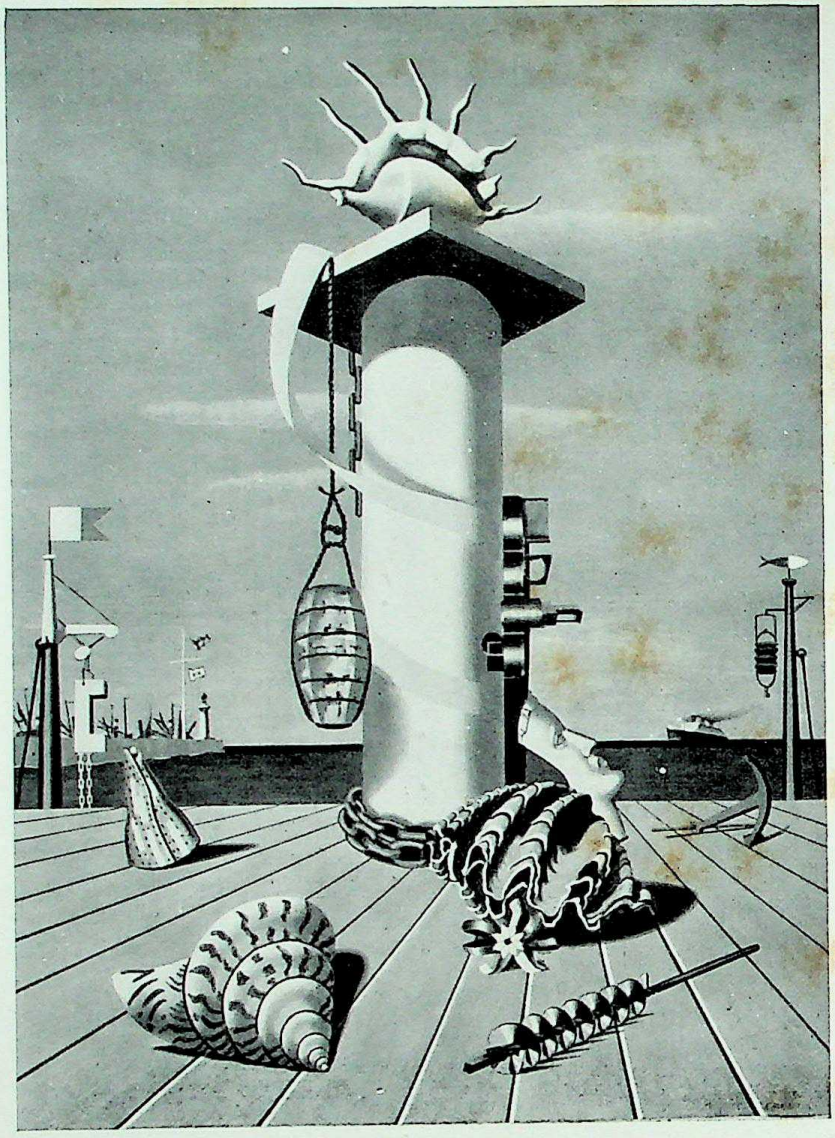

LVIII. EDWARD WADSWORTH. MURAL PANEL. S.S. 'QUEEN MARY'

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a vague streamlining. It rather means condensation of the richness of natural forms into symbol-like ones. I personally find that my imagination is not vivid enough to furnish me with as clear and detailed a form as I need, so that I have come to do very exact drawings from life for everything. In the case of groups of figures I make small models from plasticine which I light up with candles.

As for the colours, one must come to an early understanding with the architect regarding the general scheme of the room. He may have set his mind on a certain colour combination and it is sometimes difficult to persuade him that he is wrong or that his colour notions are crude. Only a painter can know the endless variety of delicate or forceful chords that can be struck and the importance of a lower or higher tone. It is quite possible to accede to the architect's wish for a certain colour and then to play with this, to set if off with others, to emphasize or contradict it in such a way as to give oneself a large variety in which to execute the picture. I must confess, though, that I have such an aversion from cream-coloured walls that I prefer not to paint on them, rather than invent a colour range into which they can be fitted. But if we have come to a proper understanding, then I do a series of colour sketches till I feel that I have got everything in the right quality and place. To give an example: in 1944 I painted the crypt of St. Elizabeth's Church in Eastbourne, a very large but low room with a row of windows along one of the shorter walls and the altar in the middle of the other one opposite. The subject given was 'Pilgrim's Progress' and I designed it as a continuous frieze of life-size figures, running along in two parts, facing each other, on the long walls, beginning on either side of the windows and meeting at the altar. To save this alignment of equally high figures from dullness, I broke them up into groups and gave them a movement towards the altar, using diagonal lines all pointing in one direction. Two girders running across the ceiling and cutting the room into three sections gave me the opportunity to create three separate colour units; the first one a fairly dark rusty colour, the second grey-pink, the third (including the altar wall) a very light pink. Over these different colours the design moves; on the first part in black, yellow and pink; on the second in very little yellow, more pink, some rusty colour and light blue; on the last in light blue, orange and a little rusty colour. A very deep purple and a warm grey run through the whole frieze, linking it together. To work out this scheme, more complicated than it sounds here, to make it move along and change, while at the same time keeping

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up the continuity, was not easy and necessitated many sketches.

Eventually I do a complete version of the whole scheme in colour, 2 inches to 1 foot, which is submitted to the architect for final approval. During all these preparations I take every opportunity of revisiting the room in order to keep its shape fresh in my mind. I also take the sketches there and project them on the wall mentally. After that, as a rule, I draw a full-size cartoon in charcoal on cartridge paper which is then traced onto the wall; and that is what I advise all art students to do. But I also beg them not to enlarge their sketch slavishly after squaring it up. Faults in the drawing, hardly noticeable in a little sketch, will loom large in the cartoon. You must not get used to filling your cartoon square by square in a mechanical way instead of learning to draw freely on a large scale. In the one case you produce a cold copy of your sketch; in the other you re-design it with new vigour. When you have drawn the outlines of your sketch into the squares of your cartoon, take a duster and lightly wipe them out. Then redraw the whole thing freely. Never think your sketch so good that you could not do better; you will often find that your proportions, which had looked right on the sketch, are not so satisfactory on the cartoon, and have to be altered because your eye, which took in the first in one glance, now has to travel upwards and sideways. Train yourself to draw your cartoon freehand; one of its greatest advantages is that it can be messed about and altered, so one should draw without hesitation or too much measuring. One has to learn how to move on a large surface; most of us have been cramped by too much small work. If one looks at the frescoes of the Renaissance artists, one is amazed to see the free, bold and exact handwriting. This can only be gained by the practice of drawing on a large scale. Once finished the cartoons are stuck to the wall with a rubber solution which leaves no trace when pulled off, and traced with the help of black (not blue) carbon paper, or of a perforating wheel and a bag of charcoal dust.

In the alternative case, where I do not draw a full-scale cartoon because there is not sufficient time or, as at St. Elizabeth's, the space to be covered is too large, I either draw straight on the wall with charcoal, or use the following device. I cover my sketch with a stout sheet of cellophane on which I have traced, with a knife, a network of 1-inch squares. Against the wall I place a wooden frame, the invention of Mr. L. H. Snowden in Eastbourne; this is 3 feet wide, as high as the wall permits, and covered with string stretched across vertically and

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horizontally to form 6-inch squares. By this means I can very quickly establish the position on the wall of salient points, the height of a figure, the tip of a nose, an outstretched hand. These few indications enable me to draw in the rest freely, and if I hesitate I can always fall back on my detail drawings.

About the painting I can say nothing; every artist has his own approach. Of course one starts with large colour areas and covers the whole extension of the picture evenly before going into details; in fresco this holds good only for the limited part to be finished the same day. One has to step back from the work, or climb down from the scaffolding, far more often than with an easel picture, so as not to lose the general effect, and a mirror for controlling one's composition and stability is essential.

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IX

Practical Possibilities

Now that we have discussed what a mural painting should look like and how it is to be executed, there remain the practical questions: Where can it be used and in what form? What characteristics should it bear in each particular case? We shall find that it is very widely applicable and that it can assume very different shapes.

Let us begin with the most controversial possibility, that of the mural in the private house or flat. Here we cut across the interests of large numbers of people, art dealers and painters of easel pictures, who will immediately begin to protest that one cannot live with the same thing over the mantelpiece for ever; that one must have change. This, I think, is sheer nonsense and sounds like the equally stereotyped declaration, 'I could not live with central heating;' both statements usually come from people who have never really tried either. With the exception of one lady who hung a mirror over part of a decoration I had done for her, I have never yet found people to get tired of their murals. And why should they? Most people live with the same pictures all their life and come to love them better for it. I have carried about with me, since my student days in Paris, an Egyptian mask I bought there, and I am still not tired of its smile and the changing light on its features. The mural must be so good that it does not yield all its beauty and secrets at the first glance; that is the simple solution. On the other hand, the wish to change a painting or a water-colour or drawing may arise just because they are detachable and separate things which sit only lightly on the wall. One of the mural's greatest attractions is its emplacement, its unity with the background, the way it holds the whole room together. One must have seen a place without and then with a wall painting in order to realize how very greatly it can be enhanced and made important, festive and proud of itself. And finally the people who like changing their pictures usually also change domicile now and then, and why should they not have a new

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mural every time? A domestic decoration should not be expensive; also we painters should not be too upset if one of our own is whitewashed by the next inhabitant. If people do not want to lose their murals, they can have them painted on panels set flush with the wall, or reaching from the cornices to the skirting so that they show only a thin vertical line on either side, or cut out in an irregular shape to be determined by the artist; these panels to be fixed to the wall first and then painted.

To paint a mural in a place where people live their everyday life requires much tact and experience, as neither the colour scheme nor the shapes of the picture must interfere with the changing moods and activities of the owner. Only a large room or a long one lends itself to decorating. A wall painting has to be seen at a certain distance which ought to increase with the size of the work. Even where an illusion of additional space is aimed at, this is only convincing where painting and room can be viewed together. Care must be taken that the forms of the painting and the design as a whole do not dwarf the inhabitants and the furniture by their size or become too real by the depth of their colour and shading; competition between the picture and reality must be resolutely avoided. No violent action should disturb the inhabitants either; if the subject given is an agitated one, the movement must be counteracted by great reticence of treatment. Human figures or animals should be less than life size. In order to avoid heaviness, which would be fatal in a comparatively small room, I recommend resorting to the earlier mentioned convention of transparency. That only small areas should be covered is clear; also that colours should be as light as possible. Because of the narrow space, the domestic character and the presence of furniture and other articles of daily use, a greater amount of detail and finish is required than in most other kinds of mural. The colour scheme must carefully match the contents of the room; all tints should be clearly defined so that they are either exactly the same as, or markedly different from those of furniture, carpets and hangings. As to the technique, murals in private houses seem to me to be the only ones that can be justifiably painted in oil. They are always kept at a reasonable temperature and fairly dry, so that condensation of water is not to be expected. Oil painted walls and ceilings stand up better to daily wear and to washing and cleaning than distempered ones. Varnished tempera, Walpamur or Stic B are also to be recommended.

The use of mural painting in places of entertainment is so common that I

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need do no more than mention it. In restaurants, hotels, dance-halls, theatres, cinemas the practice was never given up, although the results were and are often crude; still, as the decoration of British Restaurants, to be seen all over the country, shows, improvement is on the way, and in Kenneth Rowntree's mural at Acton an admirable result is reached. Edward Bawden's work at the International Building Club has the most elegant, precise and witty drawing and great airiness, while Hans Tisdall, at the same place and at the Majorca Restaurant, displays abundant invention, a wealth of exquisite detail in form and colour, and the soundest technique. One word about theatres and cinemas. Mural decorations in the auditorium are of doubtful value. They are, of course, plunged into darkness as soon as the play begins and so do not clash with the stage directly; also it is pleasant to have something to look at before the curtain goes up. But a play, opera or film has a strong visual appeal and that is weakened in its after-effect, during the intervals and after the end, by the interference of decorations. At any rate these should be confined to the area right and left of the stage, so that the spectators need not wriggle round in their seats to see the whole scheme. Clive Gardiner's decorations at Toynbee Hall are not only excellent pieces of designing but also very well placed. But the ideal spot for a painting is still the safety curtain. Right through my youth I used to gaze with enchantment at the one in our opera-house, which was built on the lines of the Paris opera; and while I cannot remember anything of the other paintings that were lavished all over the building, that on the safety curtain is still vivid in my memory.

Museums offer large and, in this country, hitherto unexploited possibilities. To illustrate the development of some scientific process or geological formation, to show the history or natural surroundings of an exhibit or some particular qualities it possesses, these and other things have been used for mural paintings in Continental museums, where they not only brighten these usually dreary halls and passages with light colours and so banish that well-known mortuary look, but also convey the information usually given in dry little diagrams and typewritten labels—and in a way easier to understand. Even zoological gardens could benefit much by such treatment. The ordinary visitor, gaping without comprehension at an animal, could be made to understand its strange shape by being shown under what conditions it lives and how it grew its special features. The development of different species from a common root, the gradual shaping

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of the elephant's trunk and tusk, of the horse's hooves and teeth, of birds' wings, these are subjects that would lend themselves beautifully to decoration. Of course, in the vicinity of living creatures, all pictures would have to be strongly stylized, with the emphasis on clear outlines and flat, non-naturalistic colour. Very hard-wearing colours, such as are manufactured by several firms, must be used, especially designed for resistance to dirt and moisture.

Mural painting for commercial purposes, in stores, showrooms, on exhibition stands, falls very much under the same category as poster designing, except that it wants more finality and structural firmness. The fashion and cosmetics trades have produced some remarkably good ones, bold and elegant, chiefly in France and the U.S.A. As longevity is not required here, distemper or Walpamur are good media to use, particularly because of their beautiful and flattering pastel shades. Board rooms and meeting rooms of big firms or corporations have been very successfully decorated in the Northern countries and in Switzerland. To see the activities of a company illustrated should prove as inspiring to directors or visitors as the usual stern and dull portrait of the chairman, done by some fashionable hack at three times the cost of a mural. I show one of John Armstrong's murals at the Shell-Mex House and Kenneth Rowntree's at the City of London Electric Lighting Co. Both are economical in their means; the first one has a strong imaginative and dynamic quality; the second is strikingly architectural, well balanced and clearly graded in tonal values. The mural by Stöcklin, a Swiss painter, is fascinating for its subject and bold approach.

Buildings devoted to public service, post-offices, railway and underground stations, offices and passages in town halls, could all show in wall paintings the extent, intricacy and efficiency of their service to a usually uncomprehending and exacting public.

Who does not remember the long whitewashed passages and colourless rooms of his school? Nowadays we try to raise the child's artistic sensibility by light and colour, by a well-organized decorative scheme comprising the whole building. This can include large maps, scenes from history, diagrams of scientific or mathematical problems, and many other subjects. All this has to be painted in a simple, narrative manner, in symbolical colour and two-dimensional treatment, executed in hard-wearing paint and placed sufficiently high up on the wall to be out of reach for little hands. Some area on the wall

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should be left empty and reserved for the children's own paintings, to be done in poster colour.

Health centres, hospitals, sanatoria, asylums could be much embellished and a good deal of instruction imparted simply and impressively by demonstrating questions of hygiene, nursing, mothercraft, physical rehabilitation. It has been established that ailing and convalescent persons are most susceptible and responsive to colour and pictures and that the decoration of public and private wards with light, delicate tints and murals of gay scenery has a soothing and healing effect. Great care must be taken not to introduce any features that might be turned into nightmares by a feverish mind. Apparently jolly and grotesque figures easily reveal a threatening aspect; a transformation familiar to most of us from Disney cartoons.

In the various categories mentioned so far, the painter has to subordinate himself very much to the aims of his patron and the often specialized subject. He can derive a great deal of satisfaction out of the original and convincing handling and skilful solution of a tricky task, and the beauty of form and colour imparted; but he cannot give free play to his deeper sensations and emotions which would take hold of his work and transform it in their sense from the inside. There are, however, occasions when the artist can rise to the full height of his power, because the subject given to him is of a universal character and permits great latitude of expression. The decoration of halls destined as meeting places for large numbers of people on festive or solemn occasions, of which buildings we shall probably have a much larger number in years to come, calls for mural paintings expressing fundamental ideas of solidarity, of common joy, pride in achievement, sorrow over loss. Men and women are conscious of the momentous period through which they have lived and will wish to see themselves mirrored in their activities, trials and triumphs, and to leave a worthy record to future generations. No artist could ask for a greater task; no task could arouse greater apprehension in the mind of the critic. Nothing can be duller than a huge panel depicting some form of activity in conventionally grouped figures, more or less completely clad, awkwardly handling a few implements symbolizing their particular occupation. This kind of monumental approach is definitely dead and a skilful photomontage would be better. How to unite the almost abstract qualities of a design with the sharply concrete ones of the activity to be depicted; how to find the realistic elements that have sym-

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bolical value, that is a task asking for no mean inventive ability on the part of the artist, and I think that we have here one of the cases where we can learn from the advertising designer, from men like Cassandre, Carlu, or McKnight Kauffer. At any rate I hope we shall be spared those well-meant and studied, but badly painted compositions with lumpy figures *à la* Diego Rivera or twisted ones *à la* Stanley Spencer, and whimsical vignettes copied from old prints by clever art students.

It is possible that murals coming under this section will be inferior, just because of the great freedom they leave, to the more specialized and less ambitious ones. On the other hand, the last war produced Paul Nash's 'Menin Road,' and at present English art is at a very high level; romantic vision, the power to see the strangeness in everyday life, beautiful draughtsmanship and organizing ability, these have seldom been so consciously developed; so that it should be possible to see results both interesting as personal statements and profound enough to reach into the deeper sphere of common feeling and understanding. Let us hope for paintings that are bold, colourful, briskly painted, economical in detail, and unfinished rather than over-elaborated. If the design and groundwork are good, the spectator will enjoy filling in the details in his mind; if the composition is bad, unbalanced and fussy, no amount of surface work will relieve his uneasiness.

I have kept to the last the greatest realm of mural painting, the sphere where it first developed and was nursed through the centuries, where it received its deepest stimuli and reached the most sublime fulfilment. The Church was art's greatest patron; from her there flowed to the artist an unending stream of ecstasy, deepest emotion, vision, symbols and images, to which he answered by lavishing on her glorification all his creative power, all his inventiveness and all the beauty he could gather. It was the happiest union our art has ever known and it saw its last, supreme realization in the Baroque. When that broke down, both lost much of their power; they struggled on, through adverse times, and both suffered from the separation. But it seems as if the Church were awakening to the fact that she had deprived herself of one of her truest servants and showed herself ready, as part of her general rejuvenation, to accept his services once more. The painter who has long ago left behind the world of realism and is getting tired of pure optical sensations, of playing with detached forms and of wandering through the inferno-like regions of surrealism, would be only too happy to

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offer himself again as interpreter of the divine message. Both, however, have changed very much since they parted company and are eyeing each other with uneasiness on the painter's and bewilderment on the Church's side. The Church has lost her superb taste and become used to the horrible, degraded things that commercial unscrupulousness has foisted on to her; of modern art she knows nothing. The artist is probably religious in his own way, but no longer conversant with the doctrine and ritual of the Church, and he has lost the conventions of religious art, the language in which former generations expressed themselves fluently. This language has more or less died during the interval, and our changed religious attitude makes the creation of a new one most difficult. Our innermost feelings may be as intense as of old, but we are shyer, less robust, more individually self-conscious, and less attached to traditional symbols. The creation of a new style of religious interpretation is made more difficult still by the fact that there exists no universal new style in art, but only a mass of personal expressions. So what are we to do?

Some say, man should pray in an empty church, without pictures. I think, however, that this argument would hold good only in the case of people who can concentrate easily and whose mind is rich in religious conceptions. But modern people come into church with the impressions of the outside world and all its images, posters, slogans still quivering in their mind. Their beliefs are shadowy and elusive; they sit and cannot focus their attention on their prayers. But if there are paintings and sculpture around them, their minds can fix on these, quieten gradually and make their ascent into the world of which the pictures are only the shadow.

There is a strong tendency on the side of the Church to shirk the question of style and cling to long-established forms and symbols; this seems to me a most dangerous policy. At no time during her long history up to the beginning of the last century has the Church closed herself to contemporary spiritual life, but always shown herself ready to grow and change, and make use of new forces. Never did she cling to any particular style in architecture or painting; in fact, new styles were largely developed as consequences of her own change. Only during the last century did the Church become conservative and antiquarian in her artistic taste; a fact that might reflect not too favourably on her inner life. It should be clear that the use of Norman or Gothic forms, which were created in ages infinitely remote and different from ours, is an artificiality

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which tends to separate the Church and all it stands for still more from the rest of modern life and put it into a remote corner. The ordinary man who easily takes the Church for a relic from the past, does so not least for its appearance. Among artists there are, of course, quite a number of weaker ones who will be glad to don historical garb and be relieved of the necessity to feel or invent something of their own. But no really good artist will do so, because to him form and content are one and he cannot falsify the one without destroying the other. This is one of the reasons why so much religious painting, in its old-masterly appearance, smacks of pastiche and is so blatantly insincere.

On the other hand, it must be recognized that the religious conceptions which everybody carries within himself are coloured by the endless flow of paintings, sculpture, architecture that has been emanating from the Church for ages past. Even the most independent imagination can hardly conceive a religious scene or symbol that does not bear a touch of tradition. To build a church without any rounded, tapering or vertically stretched shape somewhere, in apse, roof, arches, doors or windows, would probably mean the absence of any atmosphere conducive to recollection and elation. To paint the persons of the religious drama without a single one of their habitual characteristics of feature, dress or attitude, might shock not only conventional and habit-hardened people, but also the sincere and delicate feelings of those who carry a deeply alive conception within themselves.

With artists who can simply assume the attitude of Byzantine, Norman or Gothic style, I am not concerned here. They may even be truly religious; but theirs is an artistic insincerity which robs their work of the power to convince. To the others I would say: do not attempt to paint religious pictures unless you feel that you move naturally and gladly in the world out of which they come, and that you see there things which you can offer as your own contribution to the existing treasure of art. Bear in mind your responsibility towards the people who take your work in good faith and, although it is your own vision which makes your paintings valuable, do not let your personal idiosyncrasies and temperament give them a distorted perspective. Once you have convinced yourself that you are quite clear about your work and have put it on as broad a basis as your artistic convictions permit, carry it out as vigorously as you can and without further compromise.

There is another danger against which I would like to warn Church authorities,

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architects, painters and sculptors: that of talking baby language. To see the way some of our best church and cathedral builders decorate their work with nursery emblems, golden stars, chubby Christmas angels, lilies, lambs and shepherds, insipid sculpture and paintings of a silly, false naïvety, one wonders in what world they live. The men who come home from the war, and all the rest of us, have seen too much horror and evil; when we close our eyes terrible sights haunt us; the world is seething with bestiality; and it is all man's doing. Only the most profound, tragic, moving, sublime vision can redeem us. The voice of the Church should be heard loud over the thunderstorm; and the artist should be her mouthpiece, as of old. But for that a bold policy is needed; only by trial and error can the right attitude and a new tradition be established. The artists are more than ready; modern painting possesses the requirements to a degree not reached for more than one hundred years. It is for the leaders of the Church to take the initiative, to commission the best artists, the real representatives of our time, to give them intelligent guidance in a sphere new to them, and to have sufficient confidence in their artistic and human quality to give them free play. The artist on his side, it will be found, is always glad to have the collaboration of the patron. He does not want to be offered a vacuum to fill as he pleases, he likes to be given the material; but he must be permitted to use it in his own way.

I have now said everything I can think of about mural painting. But I should still like to address a few words to any architect who happens to read this book. Perhaps you have become interested and would like to use mural painting some time or other. May I implore you, then, not to call in the painter when your building is finished and perhaps even furnished. Persuade your client from the outset to put aside some money for the painting; a small sum only, in comparison to the whole cost, is necessary. Design your room so that it leads up to the mural; discuss the whole plan and the effect you are aiming at with the painter. If the picture is to be the focal point of an interior, you must arrange not only the shape of the room with him, but the plaster-work, the whole colour scheme, and the shape and position of everything that goes into the room. If you have any awkwardly-shaped space, long passages, blank walls, he may be able to transform just those into something surprising and pleasant. I wish you would go even further and say to the painter: 'These and these are the principles of my building; its stresses and strains run thus and thus; these

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walls here are the important ones and have to be underlined; these others should be invisible; I want light here and darkness there. Now what do you propose to do to help my work and bring it to a perfect finish?' But to come to such close collaboration, architect and painter must really get to know each other. It has long been a pet idea of mine that we ought to have a small group of architects, painters and sculptors who would meet and discuss their work, to learn what the other arts can do and what they need, and finally to collaborate on any job that might come along. There existed before the war, and perhaps still exists, a French society, L'Union des Artistes Modernes, to which belonged, among architects, Le Corbusier, Jeannerot, Gropius, and among painters Leger, Severini, Lurçat. The members had found that there was a common spirit between them, they worked together, established their artistic creed and programme, had small exhibitions first and were much abused; larger ones later, with great success. They designed and built, furnished and decorated. In their case it was perhaps a slightly one-sided affair, of a self-conscious modernity with the accent on the functional, and art pushed towards the superficially decorative. Still their architects were ready to include painting and sculpture in the conception of their work, and the painters learned to express themselves in a manner suitable for the architecture. Will it be possible to form something similar in this country?

I have finished. Perhaps I have disappointed some readers, art students in particular, by expressing myself so much in general terms. But I hate giving recipes and I do not want to make the task easier for anybody; I want to stimulate. If I have succeeded there; if painters feel they would like to do murals and architects feel they would like to use them in their buildings, then I am satisfied.

THE END

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